PUNCH'S FUNNY WEEKLY

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Though spinsters say 'tis hard to find
A Romeo, fair Rosalind
Could have her choice of any kind
(From customers on love designed),
From aldermen, who wined and dined,
To giddy colonels, long resigned;
From coronets with wealth combined,
To errand boys, who drooped and pined.
But no; not she! She stood behind
Her marble stall, to lovers blind.
(And though she never once assigned
A cause why she should do so, mind!)
She yet persistently declined
To entertain a *beau*
(A dashing, mashing *beau*).
"I'm not the least that way inclined,"
She'd say with scorn, "No, no!"
A quick, derisive "No," dear boys,
A firm, decisive "No!"

Of all the lads upon the sea,
Sure none was half so smart
As Timothy, boy Timothy,
The darling of her heart.
Apprenticed to a sailing ship
To serve three years or so.

F all the girls in Dublin town,
Sure none was half so sweet
As Rosalind, fair Rosalind,
The pride of Sackville Street.
Apprenticed to a pastry-cook
To serve three years or so,
With bashful smile and downcast look,
Her pretty little head she shook
who work forsook,
y stall partook

A wicked scamp, a roving rip,
With fearless heart and manly grip,
She loved him all. Though 'twixt the lip
And cup, we know, a tiny slip
Doth oft occur, the shattered parts
Resembling broken scraps of hearts
And shafts from Cupids bow
(That naughty cherub's *bow!*).
So bound by Cupid's sacred *tie*
(You will, I trust, the pun espy!),
With breaking heart and bitter cry,
With stifled sob, and pleading sigh,
Fair Rosalind she wept good-bye.
And Timothy with hat awry,
And throat uncommon parched and dry,
Looked plaintively toward the sky
(Except to rhyme, I here defy
A single soul to tell me why
And made this soothing [illegible]
"However cunning, deep or [illegible]
Those dar[illegible]ts are, wh[illegible]
[illegible]y'll find

I'll say, with scorn, 'No, no!'
A firm decisive 'No, dear girls;'
A quick, derisive 'No!'"

Tim hadn't been a week at sea.
When down he had to go,
For rank and flagrant mutiny,
In prison chains below,
For chronic insobriety
To dark, damp cells confined,
Unused to prison diet, he
Opined the sweet society,
The infinite variety,
The unaffected piety,
The unexcelled propriety,
He found in Rosalind
(His only Rosalind!).
But strange are facts. Off Chuckaboo,
The ship went down with half its crew,
In Neptune's arms entwined.
Sweet Providence will never fail
Stern British pluck, which scorns to quail
Before an equinoctial gale.
So hero Tim, but fresh from jail,
Like wood to freshly-driven nail,
Hung on (though fainting, sore and frail)
To broken raft with tattered sail,
With dauntless pluck which nought could pale,
With pumping-rod and water bail,
With three small pints of bottled ale,
And two sea biscuits somewhat stale;
But he survived to tell the tale,
To all who seemed inclined—
How picked up by a passing Mail,
He was to Cork consigned

: RAIL.

:ECHURCH.

…BERY.

: him in Japan, and I
ey. Why, he's worth at
ugh, of course, he didn't
buy him over again the

Well, fill up your glass and
ather a long story; besides
know, and you ought to hear
one of the cleverest bits of
heard of."

the story then, Major," said I,
little Japanese dog we had been
before the fire sound asleep, had
on the line.

e Major, "is well known among the
kingdom. As I told you, I have shown him s… and again on account of his extreme rarity, for … elieve there are half-a-dozen of the same breed in Europe. He has attracted considerable attention, and, I may say, provoked a certain amount of jealousy among fellow lovers of the canine tribe.

"About six weeks ago I entered him for a big three days' show at Birmingham, and took him down there myself. Shortly after the opening I was accosted by a dog fancier named Pinkham, whom I knew, just as I was standing near my dog.

"'Ah, he's a beauty, he is! Can't induce you to strike a bargain, I suppose, sir?'

"'No, I think not.' He had asked me this several times before.

"'Going to keep him here all three days?'

"'Yes.'

"'If you don't want to take him back to London directly, I've got a place here, sir, where I could make him comfortable.'

"'No, thanks. I've got to show him again on Friday, so e'll be sent up to town by the 7.50 express to Paddington n Thursday night, an hour or two before this show closes.'

"'I see, sir. Ah, that's his travelling carriage, I uppose?' pointing to a comfortably fitted-up basket, out of hich I had not long taken him, and which had not yet een removed.

"'Aye, that's what he travels in under charge of the uard when I'm not with him. Well, good-day, Pinkham.'

"'Good-day, sir. If you ever *do* want to part with him, orget I'd like to drive a bargain over him—excuse me, see you again here, sir?'

I'm going back to town to-day,' I replied, wondering a moment what made him so inquisitive, 'and I me down again.'

tell you I have a great friend living at Birmingham, and he had promised to watch Yokomè—that's the animal's name at the show. I had also made arrangements with him o send the dog off from Snow Hill Station on the Thursday vening, requesting him to put Yokomè in special charge f the guard, and to wait till the train had started. This rain is timed to arrive at Paddington at 10.45, and I rdered my groom to meet it and to bring the dog home. t about a quarter to nine I received a telegram from my irmingham friend sent off from Snow Hill Station at 7.53, nd saying: 'Dog safely dispatched.' My house, as you now, is scarcely ten minutes from Paddington, and a few minutes after eleven in dashed my groom with the astounding news.

"'He's lost, sir!'

"'Lost? What do you mean, James?'

"'He wasn't in the van!'

"'Did you see the guard?'

"'Yes, sir. He says he was there when they started from Reading, and that no one had been in the van since, and he hadn't left it. *He* didn't miss the basket till the luggage was unloaded, but for the last part of the journey he had been busy making out his "way-bills." But he's certain no one was in the van with him.'

"'That train doesn't stop after Reading, does it?'

"'No, sir.'

"Well, I'm afraid I used very strong language. It was too late to do anything that night, and to my great mortication a letter which arrived by the first post in the orning obliged me to set off instantly to Paris on a matter urgent business. When I returned on the Monday ning my first question was:

'Well, has anything been heard of Yokomè?'

No, sir. We advertised and communicated with the as you told us, but we've heard nothing. But there range man asking for you this afternoon. He ticularly anxious to see you, and left word that the morning.'

was at breakfast the next day this man called ny orders, was shown into my room. He ing man, with a smell of bad tobacco, a sort of mixture between that of a ounger.' He held his hat in his hands, nfortably.

do you want?'

dawg, aint ye?'

'e was.'

you comes down 'andsome, that 'ere dawg's found. you can't do nothin', leastways it's no use you're sett… p'lice on this job, 'cause then you won't ever see the… again.'

"'Do you mean to threaten me?' I asked.

"'Do you want that 'ere dawg, or *don't yer*? *That's the* point, and that's all yer'll get outer me. I shan't answe… no more questions.'

"'But this is blackmail, my man.'

"'Black or white male, or female either, it don't consarn me. *Do you want that 'ere dawg back?*'

"I began to see that there was only one way out of it, so I said:

"'Well, suppose I am willing to get the dog back in the way you suggest, what are your terms?'

"'Ah, I thought ye'd come round sensible like! Wal, sir, me and a pal o' mine has bin a talkin' it over, and if you come down with forty pound and swear as you'll hold yer tongue and not split on us, the dawg's yourn. There, that's the long and short on it.'

"Well, I thought it over, and at length came to the conclusion that my only course was to submit to his terms if I wanted to recover the dog. I saw it was no use sending for the police, because, of course, he had not brought the animal with him. So I asked him what he wanted me to do. He replied that I must go with him, promising first that I would say nothing about it to any one, and take the money with me. Then the dog would be handed over to me. After thinking it over again for a few minutes, I agreed to meet him at Willesden Junction that night, for he would not hear of my going in the daytime.

"'Wal, guv'nor,' he said, as he rose to depart, 'keep yer promise, or yer don't get that 'ere dawg back. 'Tain't no use your bringin' any one with ye to-night, fur if ye *do*, ye won't see me.'

"I took the precaution of putting a pistol in my pocket, when I went that night. He was outside the station at Willesden, and accosted me.

"'Alone, aint ye?'

"'Yes.'

"'Got the cash?'

"'Yes.'

"'Come on then, sir, we've a walk before us.'

"He led me on for some distance until we turned out of suburban streets, crossed the railway and canal, and found ourselves in a dismal sort of neighbourhood with several rows of dirty-looking houses, and the blackness of the country all round.

"'What part's this?' I asked.

"'They calls it Lower Place. 'Ere we are. Orl right, Sam,' he shouted as a door opened a little way and another man appeared. 'I've brought 'im right enough. Step inside, sir.'

"I entered the dingy room and sat down. The other villain was about as evil-looking as my guide.

"'Come fur yer dawg, guv'nor?' said he. ''Ere 'e is as lively as a flea and none the worse fur 'is little adventure. Sorry ter give yer so much trouble, mister, but bizness is bizness.'

"'Now, look here,' I said, 'you've played a dirty trick on me, but I'll stick to my promise and not betray you. Only, before I pay you that money I want to know *how* you stole my dog and how you knew about it?'

"The two men looked at one another. The first one said:

"'Shall I tell 'im, Sam?'

"'May's well. 'T won't do no 'arm, now.'

"'Wall, guv'nor,' turning to me, 'the reason *why* we took that 'ere dog was because we was put up to it, and the man as put us up to it was a feller named Pinkham.'

"'Pinkham!' I exclaimed; 'a dog breeder?'

"'Yuss; and if 'e'd stuck to 'is bargain *you* wouldn't ha' got the dawg. Me and my pal 'ere does a bit o' work fur Pinkham now and again. He saw me last Wednesday and arst me ter 'ave a drink, but I knowed 'e was arter something, and presently 'e said: "Look 'ere, Joe, do you want to earn fifty pound?"

"'"Wal," I says, "it 'ud take some earnin', wouldn't it, guv'nor?"

"'"Yes," 'e says, "you're right. It *would* take some earning."

"'"What's the job?" I asks.

"'So 'e says: "there's a dawg a goin' to be sent from Birmingham to Paddington, to-morrow, by the 7.50 evening train. He's going to travel in the guard's van—the rear one I expect, that's where he'd be most likely to be—in a square, black basket with a handle on top, and the letters 'W. B' painted in large white letters on it. Now if that dog was to get lost on the journey, and if *you* were to find him, why—you *might* bring him to me, you know, and I *think* I'd buy him."

"'I looked at 'im hard and grinned.

"'"I reckon if I wos lucky enough to find that ere dawg I should want ten pound down now just to remind me of 'im like. I *might* find 'im then."

"'He opened his purse, took out two fi'-pun notes, and handed 'em over.

"'"I *think* you'll … that dog, Davis," 'e says.

"'"… er, guv'nor," I answer.

… with Sam 'ere, and at last we hits on a p… 'twouldn't do to try and steal the dawg o… van at any station, and yet we saw if we h… be done somewhere on the journe… somethin' about railw… used … on the … in disg… about t…

a
(tl
fra
pu
ha
wait
insta
as it
signal
"'I
a-comi
slowed
for the
would
so we
the door.

"'As h
the windo
was only
jiffy, we w
the train n
man in the
out o' his box
and take out t
embankment,
started off fo
about that 'e
Guess they th
gone colour-bl

"'But, look
the guard had

"'Oh, we was
lesr, 'a tap on th
something handy

"'But how abo

"'Ah, I'm comi
'im, and finds 'im

"'"Well, what

"'"We've got t
forty quid," says I.

"'"Dog—forty
says, as innercent-lik.

"'"Come," I says,
got yer a dawg out o't
didn't yer give me two
And——"

"'"What!" 'e says, "
What do you mean by
bull story?"

"'And before I know'
'is servant 'ad showed me

"'And why wouldn't he

"'Dunno, guv'nor; that
willin' ter lose 'is ten quid
the papers (o' course, we kn
address-label), and we was a-
pound *somehow*, so I come
long and short of the matter.'

"I paid the two scoundrels, a
in his basket. They said to me as

"'Oh, look 'ere, mister. We're
this shop to-night, so 'tain't no use
again.'"

"And did you ever find out wh
robbery, and then wouldn't have th
I asked.

"Yes, and that's worth telling.
some secret information I have sin
American gentleman took a fancy
some weeks previous to the Birming
scoundrel Pinkham, with whom he
if the latter could induce me to part
a very high price for him. Pinkh
ceived the idea of robbing me. T
sail to New York, and Pinkham pla
on the Friday immediately before

"On the Thursday afternoon,
upon which the dog was stolen, this
it into his head to start for the
before he did so, sent a note to Pin
trouble any further about the dog.
mind. Of course, Pi…"
him to anyone else, o
forfeit the ten pound
ings with the villains

"And shan't you pro

"No. 'Tisn't worth
Major. "I've got the

DO SERVANTS HELP BURGLARS?

THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH DOUBT ABOUT IT ACCORDING TO A WELL-KNOWN DETECTIVE.

"THE increasing difficulty which so many ladies now experience in getting domestic servants has a very bad feature that is much more serious than the difficulty itself," said an experienced detective to *P.W.*

"The difficulties of getting a good servant are so many and so great nowadays, that ladies are ready to take anyone they can get hold of, and often with the most unsatisfactory references; and herein is the most serious feature of the whole matter.

"You will see what I am driving at when I tell you that at least one-third of the burglaries at private houses that have occurred recently have been worked through the servants. There are scores of domestic servants who apply for places merely to get into the houses for no other purpose than to find out what they can concerning the valuables and get at the locks and keys, of the latter of which they often take impressions in wax or putty, with the object of facilitating the house-breaking plans of their male relations or other men by whom they are employed to get these facts.

"I don't want to say anything to the annoyance or detriment of servants as a body, because there is no earthly reason why they should not be as honest as any other class of workers; but masters and mistresses ought to be warned against employing servants who come to them without the best 'characters' or recommendations and none should be employed upon mere written recommendations, as there are hundreds of means by which a dishonest servant can get the most flattering 'characters.' There are people who turn them out to order, and servants who sell their own to others. The risk that every person who violates these rules as to 'characters' runs is the risk of going downstairs one morning to find all portable articles of value have been cleared out during the night.

"The way it is worked is something like this. The woman is connected with some burglar—perhaps with a gang. She seeks a promising situation, and on the forged recommendations, or the 'character' of another servant which she has obtained, gets the place. A day's work will show her what the job is likely to yield, and if it is not much she goes on in such a manner as to get dismissed as quickly as possible, or perhaps makes an excuse for leaving.

"On the other hand, if the place is promising, she does her utmost to please and display her rigid honesty, until she has discovered all she wants to know, when she leaves "to be married," or upon some other excuse, much to her mistress's regret. In due time, the place is broken into, and all her information is tested with more or less satisfactory and safe results.

"Then again, many dishonest servants get into situations to work their own game; but as that is much more risky the cases of this kind are fewer than the others. But they are not by any means uncommon. More dismissed butlers and footmen have broken into houses where they were employed than you would think.

"I will tell you a story that has never been in print before, as it was hushed up at the lady's request, which was not unreasonable; but it is, nevertheless, an absolute fact. It is, without exception, one of the most extraordinary cases of the kind I know.

"A well-known and wealthy lady living in a fashionable quarter—to be frank, Belgravia—had reason to apply to us respecting some plate she had had stolen. These things had been going most mysteriously for some time when she applied, which she did at the unanimous request of her servants, who felt the matter very keenly. Well, we sent an experienced man round to inquire into the matter. He listened to the whole story and then had the servants up. One by one, he questioned them, but they seemed to know nothing whatever of the matter; and he was convinced by their replies, as he told me, that they were not implicated. When he had done, he turned to the lady and said:

"'And these are all the servants here?'

"'Yes,' she replied, 'all except my own maid.'

"'Ah, I must see her,' responded our man. 'Will you call her?'

"'I'm afraid she is away at present,' said the lady, 'but you can consider the case without her, for I will vouch for her absolute honesty. She has only been with me three months, it's true, but she has proved herself a most invaluable maid.'

"But our man was obdurate, and the lady rang the bell, and asked if the lady's maid had returned, and on being told that she had, ordered her to come up. No sooner had the maid appeared than our man gave a start and put his back against the door.

"'Is this your maid, madam?' he cried.

"'Certainly,' she replied.

"'This is not a woman at all. This is a man—a man well known to us, too.'

"And such was the case. The maid who had been attending her mistress every day for three months was in reality a young man who had already been in prison once. The lady was so shocked at the announcement—and well she might be—that she went off into a dead faint, and was seriously ill for some weeks after. You will readily understand why the case was hushed up, and the man not charged."

Elephants Die Hard.

NOT long since it was found necessary to kill a certain vicious elephant, and two physicians were appointed executioners. They fed the beast on aconite concealed in carrots and arsenic sprinkled on buns, which it swallowed pleasantly and asked for more.

Then one medical gentleman conceived the brilliant idea of loading a syringe with prussic acid, inducing the animal to open its mouth, and squirting the poison down its throat. The elephant considered this great sport, but the doctor who was working the syringe took so much interest in the experiment he momentarily forgot the deadly properties of prussic acid, inhaled the fumes, and fell to the ground in an unconscious condition.

The other physician saved his colleague's life with great difficulty, the elephant looking on sympathetically. However, after he had taken enough poison to kill two thousand men, according to the doctors, and three hours had passed since the first dose, it suddenly toppled over and expired quietly.

Some Ingenious Figuring.

THE twenty-six innocent-looking letters of the alphabet have been put to many uses and represented many things since they were first invented, not the least ingenious of which are those represented below.

No. 1 is the picture of a man of letters of the olden time. If he is examined closely, it will be seen that he is composed entirely of the twenty-six letters of the

FIG. 1. FIG. 2. FIG. 3.

alphabet, each letter being introduced once only, and as nearly as possible in the proper order.

No. 2 might be mistaken for a man of figures, if he were not, in reality, a celebrated gay and dissipated French Marshal of the early part of the present century, of whom it has been said that he relied more than he should upon the force of numbers.

No. 3 is a design for a figure-head, and contains all the numerals in order from 1 to 10.

Guide to Gardening—December.

THE back garden being plainly visible from the drawing-room window (assuming the drawing-room window is tolerably clean), and December being a month in which your friends call upon you to discuss the coming Christmas and its attendant custom of gift-making, you would do well at this time to turn your attention to a little quiet gardening.

The coal-scoop you flung at the cats one night last week, is still sticking in the middle bed. You might remove this now, and bury bulbs there in its place. Bulbs *have* been known to come to something with moderate attention.

Using the coal scoop as a trowel (there have been less wieldy substitutes than that), you should train the edges of the turf, so that, viewed from the drawing-room window, they look to be in a fairly straight line. You had a regular spade for this job once, but you lent it to one of the servants—you forget which—and she put it somewhere—you forget where. You may come across it one of these days, when you are searching for the rake.

The clothes-line, which has been playing at telegraph wires since June, is now thoroughly rotten, and may be taken down. The peg-basket also might make way for something more picturesque.

The clothes-line may be removed by planting one foot on the only promising root of the whole plantation, and untying the knot at the nail with a sharp penknife. It is as well to postpone the removal of the peg-basket and other rubbish until the evening, when your neighbours' shutters are drawn.

Insurance Coupon.

The signing of this coupon by the purchaser will be sufficient to entitle his or her next-of-kin or legal representative to the benefits of the £1,000 Railway Insurance, the Burglary Insurance, or the Football and Cycling Insurance, provided the conditions of the insurance coupons have been fulfilled.

Signature.....

Available from 5 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 22nd, 1897, until midnight, Saturday, January 1st, 1898. For full particulars see page 396.

IF ENGLAND WERE INVADED.

WHAT OUR RAILWAY COMPANIES COULD DO.

IF France or some other nation took it into its head to invade England it would find its work cut out to land its troops. But assuming that troops were landed, a great deal of our success or non-success in repelling the invader would depend on the action of the railway companies.

Probably few people know, as it is seldom talked about, how well organised our railway systems are with a view to meeting such an emergency.

Not only could the Government claim the whole services of the fixed and rolling stock of the various companies, but they could also claim the active services of nearly all the general managers and engineers of the large trunk lines, whose names, if one chooses to look, may be found in the Army List as officers in Her Majesty's junior service.

Ever since 1865 England has possessed an "Engineer and Railway Volunteer Staff Corps," a small though highly important body composed almost exclusively of officers—the managers and engineers aforesaid—whose functions hardly come to the knowledge of the average man about town.

Recently orders were issued making certain changes in the constitution of this body, and they attracted a certain amount of temporary public attention. But, generally speaking, we may say that the corps is an unknown one, and it certainly does not proclaim its existence with trumpets. Ordinarily, of course, it has little to do, yet it keeps closely in touch with the Horse Guards, and has headquarters in Great George Street, Westminster, where it meets from time to time.

In the event of threatened invasion, the members would sit permanently as a sub-division of the War Council, and the whole working of all our railway systems would come under their joint control. In this they would be subject to the instructions of the Military Headquarters Staff, and would be required to provide whatever transport was necessary.

So well organised is this Engineer and Railway Volunteer Staff Corps, and so uniform are the working of our various railways, that it is believed that the great tax that could be put upon their resources could easily met. A theoretical test of a most exacting nature made some years ago may serve to illustrate the of work with which the corps would have to in case of necessity.

The Commander-in-Chief issued a notice stating 150,000 foreign troops were invading our shores were commencing to land between Shoeburyness and Southend. In order to repel them six army corps, numbering about 130,000 men, were summoned by telegraph to concentrate near Chelmsford, and the transport of these was placed in the hands of the Railway Staff Corps.

The instructions were only general and vague. The officials were told where the various troops were stationed, and they were required to bring up three army corps at the earliest possible moment, and the whole within forty-eight hours. The ordinary train services, with the exception of the mails, were to be assumed to be suspended.

Now, under ordinary circumstances, the transport of so large a body of men within so short a space of time would be a big undertaking; but in this case the task was a much harder one, for horses had to be conveyed as well as men, and all had to be fed *en route*.

Temporary kitchens had, therefore, to be erected (theoretically) at various points, and supplied with an army of cooks and loads of eatables, and for the cavalry horse fodder had to be provided.

The work was further complicated by the fact that the trains themselves had to be concentrated at various points before the work of transport began, and the Labour Department of the corps had a vast undertaking in erecting temporary platforms and sidings for the entraining and detraining of the troops and their horses and guns. But the railway authorities made the most complete and effective response to the demands made upon them, though the response was only on paper.

By employing 515 trains whose average speed was about twenty-five miles an hour, exclusive of stoppages, the whole of this large body of troops was theoretically brought to Chelmsford within forty-six hours of the time when the first order was telegraphed.

But although this clever piece of transport was worked out only on paper, every detail was printed, and could be checked by a comparison with the ordinary workings of the companies. And those who are most familiar with railway work and the manner in which the vast holiday traffic is coped with, with comparatively little delay, will be willing to assume that the paper test was a fairly reliable one. Probably, too, the test was a very much more severe one than will ever be needed to be put into practice.

The printed record of this big undertaking, together with other schemes and arrangements for railway working in time of invasion, lie pigeon-holed in Great George Street, for instant consultation when circumstances demand it.

These facts will [illegible] be [illegible] considered [illegible] our rail[illegible]

Are your children any good [illegible]inting? If [illegible]

OTHER THESE HOLIDAYS!"

PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO SPEND A MISERABLE CHRISTMAS.

HAT people who are out of employment, dyspeptics, vellers arriving in London with no friends to visit, s and cab drivers, railway officials, and all those nose avocations take them from home on Christmas ay should regard the great festival, if not with aversion, least with indifference, is only natural.

Why there should be so many who try to make themlves as miserable as possible on that day is not as lear.

The reasons, moreover, they assign for their dislike seem ludicrously insufficient. I have heard of a large owner of house property in the West of London, who, although so mean that he insists on some of his tenants bringing their rent in two instalments in order to avoid the cost of a stamped receipt, will yet execute any repairs that may be desired, providing it can be shown that what is commonly known as a Christmas dinner was not partaken of by the tenant on that day.

That a landlord should offer to repaper his tenant's house provided he relinquished his Christmas dinner seems little less than astonishing. The surprise will not in the least degree be lessened when it is explained that some four years ago the house in which he resided was entered by burglars on Christmas Day during his absence and nearly stripped of the contents.

If the huge feasts so believed in by our forefathers were popular now, it would only be natural that persons with small appetites should dislike Christmas Day.

Thirty years ago to over-eat and over-drink oneself on this occasion was regarded, if not as a duty, at least s quite an excusable thing to do. But now that it is lear that the popularity of the day does not depend on e opportunities afforded for gormandising, all classes ould welcome the festival.

From inquiries made at some of our best known est-end clubs it would seem as if there were quite a ber of people who go out of their way to make selves extremely miserable on plum pudding day.

Christmas Eve one of the richest men in Eng and leave his country seat to avoid the Yule-tide ties, and take refuge in his London house, the servants are on board wages; sallying ight to his club, where, after dining off a chop, sleep away the evening behind a screen.

nd waiter of one palatial club in Pall Mall tells but for a dozen or more members who prefer eir time in solitary grandeur here to spending with their friends at home, I should be able yself with my youngsters.

"One comes here, I think, because he can have the services of half a-dozen waiters all to himself on that day. Another dislikes the day because he cannot endure the spectacle of people trying to look happy and unconcerned when all the time they are, he declares, miserably bewailing the expense they have been put to."

Another of these misanthropical worthies that I have recently heard of bases his dislike of the day on the quarrelling which results from the quantity of strong drink consumed.

The conduct of one family with whom the writer is acquainted certainly supports this gentleman's contention. The custom which leads the members of the family to meet on Christmas Day is so strong that the yearly reunion has not been broken for forty years.

Yet if anyone of them really believes that a contented mind is a continual feast, they must look forward to the anniversary with absolute horror, for the evening is invariably spent in quarrelling.

The taunts flying about are so bitter, that it requires the intervention of another twelve months before the wrath of the members has sufficiently cooled down to permit of their meeting each other again.

But of all the persons who have a sufficient reason for disliking Christmas Day, commend me to the relatives of a very rich old gentleman, who, being extremely misanthropical—owing, I am told, to a love disappointment in early life—derives the keenest enjoyment from making such of his kinsman as accept his invitation to dine with him on Christmas Day as miserable as he can.

This he accomplishes by raising their hopes of receiving a legacy to the very highest pitch of expectation, and then a little later dashing them all to the ground. To the people who assemble round the board of this kindly-intentioned old curmudgeon, Christmas Day must of all days be the most miserable in the year. Yet they must somehow enjoy themselves, or why do they go?

MRS. HICKS: "Bear in mind, yo ng man, that Santa Claus brings presents only to good little boys."

Dick Hicks: "That just hits me. I've been so good fo a month that none of the boys will play with me."

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ife was rather worried when I left her this

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Ye Foolish Old Bard and ye Wise Young Troubadour.

YE mightie King sat in his halle, his nobles atte his syde,
But bored in sooth, to say the truth, for alle his haughtie pride.
He would not to ye green woode goe, nor hunting of ye hart or doe,
What once he much admired.
And when Sir Bertram Bevis spake of hawking heron by ye lake,
Ye King with glance did make him quake,
Saith he: "You make me tired!"
Then up and stood his seneschal and craved his liege's grace;
He saith: "There stands without ye halle, two wand'ring minstrels at your call,
And strangers to ye place.
A harper one, a man of eld, a bard such as in Scotland dwelled
In other times gone by.
He wakes his wild harp's martial strains with sturdy, strong and bold refrains
Which make men fight and die
Ye other's but a troubadour, such as without ye postern door
At midnight serenades.
And though ye archers atte him shoot, yet still ye maundering galoot
Will yowl his ballads to his lute,
To please ye love-sicke maides."

"We'll see him later," said ye King; "but first we'll have ye harper sing.
These lutists give me pains;
But wandering minstrels bowed by age are taught by time to be more sage,
And come in when it rains."
Ye harper's seated in ye halle, across ye strings his fingers falle,
And he could play I wis:
He bowed with reverence to ye King, and with cracked voice essayed to sing,
A strain that ran like this:

"Oh King! ye sit within your halle, with knights and nobles at your call,
And never one has got the gall
To ever say ye nay!
For all these vanities of time, thy costly fare and raiment fine,
Some day must pass away.
Beware! Beware! your doleful doom, when you shall moulder in ye tomb——"
He got no further, for ye King his sceptre then did at him fling,
Which hap'ly was not sharp,
The dogs were at ye croaker sic'd—then one and all ye good knights kicked,
Ye stuffing from his harp.

"Bring now ye other minstrel in!" then cried ye King as amid the din,
"And if he sings such doleful lays
As hath this mug we've lately heard, upon my royal oath and word,
I'll give him sixty days!"
Ye other minstrel, young was he, he touched his lute most daintilie,
And said: "I'll do me best;
For I have played in many lands with Georgie Minstrels—one-night stands—
But out in Exeter we strands,
An' I hoofs it from de west!"

Then he touched his lute to a merry air and did his best turn for them there,
In a way that caught ye gang.
He had no doleful tale to tell, but he gave them ye lay of "Daisie Belle,"
And this likewise he sang:
"Oh never was there a king like you, or ever one half as great;
I tell ye truth as a regular thing, and I give this to you straight!
You've got a record out of sight, you always treat your people white,
And they to honour you delight, O King! most wise and great!"

Atte this ye monarche beamed with glee, "I will not hear you more," saith he,
"For my great holt is modesty, and you have sung enough!"
But, by request, "After ye Balle," and "Daisie Belle" too, he sang for all,
Until the nobles in the halle cried, loudly, "That's ye stuffe!"

L'ENVOI.

Ye moral of this ancient lay still holdeth good until this day,
The which is simply this:
That he who for a guerdon sings, must ne'er harp on unpleasant [illegible]
[illegible]nts, [illegible] knaves, or kings; and this is true

"OUR DANCE, I BELIEVE!"

A CHAT ON BALL PROGRAMMES.

"YES," said the manager of a large ball programme printing concern to *P.W.*, "ball programmes are printed in hundreds of styles. Every October we prepare a sample book of new designs, including those of ball programmes, menu and invitation cards, a copy of which is sent to all our best customers.

"The average number of new designs is a thousand, and the drawings are either done by our own staff, or are selected by us from the thousands that are sent in for approval by outside contributors. If a particular design should have caught the public fancy during the previous year, we reproduce it in the next year's design, but this seldom occurs.

"In exceptional instances I have known ball programmes to be printed on satin, silk, celluloid, and other delicate materials, but such an order would be considered a rare novelty.

"The demand is for good cream-laid card with colour-printing, engraving, and gold-blocking, and occasionally embossing. There are few public bodies or societies that have not their own particular programme. Here, for instance, is one for cycling clubs, another for yachting clubs, another for military dances, while golf, cricket, football, and so forth, have their respective programmes. The design of each is peculiar to the club or society, and you can have the printing and colouring as plain or as rich as you like.

"This programme for musical societies is considered to be pretty and attractive, the blending of the colours being very perfect, irrespective of the purity of the design.

"Most of the 'æsthetic' programmes are after Aubrey Beardsley, and are popular with dancers. Now and again we experience a flutter of lace programmes. They are a novelty, and at once pretty and effective.

"Ours is the representative house for ball programmes of all kinds, and our average output is about a million annually. There are not now so many public dances as in late years, but people are giving more private dances, and the better kind of ball programmes are in request.

"Illuminated work costs the highest price, and so, too, special symbolic designed work for exceptional gatherings; but an ordinary 3¾in. by 2¾in. programme would cost about six shillings per hundred—design, perhaps this: a lady on a bicycle pursued by Cupids. Rather dainty, isn't it? Here's a spray of forget me-nots in colours with gold—six shillings a hundred to the trade.

"A programme in demand this year is a figure representing either the queen of spades, hearts, clubs, or diamonds, printed in colours with gold. Here is a volunteer ball programme, showing rifles, bugle, and crown in colours. The army design is the Royal Standard and Union Jack, surmounted by a crown in colours and gold. Sizes vary slightly in stock programmes. Scotsmen are delighted with this design—a figure of a Highlander dancing; while Irishmen favour this—figure of a pretty Irish girl dancing, all printed in colours and gold. This 'Sweet Pea' design costs 4s. a hundred only.

"Amateur dramatic clubs favour this—Romeo and Juliet, a very pretty design. The stage proper like this design—Esmeralda with tambourine and roses in natural colours and gold. Not a bad card is this—a lady in evening dress throwing kisses. Huntsmen patronise this one—lady in hunting costume, and so on.

"The pencils and tassels for the programmes are a separate article of furniture, and are produced in great variety of colours, qualities, sizes, and styles, and sold in enormous numbers. Including the cheap ball programmes and the output of other firms, we should say that the number of ball programmes used throughout the season in this country must run into several millions, so Terpsichore is a paying goddess."

"OUR typewriter girl is awfully clever; she can sharpen lead-pencils."

"Pooh! Ours can beat that. She has five clerks in the office dying to sharpen them for her."

A LITTLE girl was one day running down a street when she accidentally fell, cutting her hand on a stone. A benevolent old lady went up to her and assisted her to rise, at the same time exclaiming:

"My poor wee lassie! My poor wee lassie! Are you much hurt?"

The little piece of humanity wiped away her tears and exclaimed indignantly:

"I'm no' a puir lassie. My father has money in the bank!"

"THERE is no use trying to deny it," said one man to another. "Bums is badly married. I hate to say it, but it's so."

"How do you know?"

"By a talk I have just had with him."

"Does he complain?"

"No. That's the pathetic part of it. He was telling me how good-natured and clever his wife is, because, this morning, she showed him how to fasten his braces to his trousers with a hair-pin."

been hel to make room for

Games for Christmas Parties.

To Make the Flame of a Candle Come Towards You by Blowing.

HOLD or affix a piece of card in front of a lighted candle, and blow upon the card. Those who are watching will see the flame of the candle flicker and incline towards you. At first thought this appears surprising, but it is explained in this way:

Your breath, striking the cardboard, is sent back towards you with sufficient force to draw with it a certain quantity of the air surrounding the flame. The latter is thus momentarily in a current of air going in the opposite direction to your puff, and is naturally drawn with it.

Rolling Up Hill.

WE know that any body not absolutely flat if placed on an inclined plane will roll down. The following trick is an apparent contradiction of the law of the inclined plane.

Take two shades, or cones made of cardboard, and stick them together at their bases. Select two books of unequal dimensions and stand them on end; then place two canes upon these books, taking care that the lower ends are closer together than the upper extremities. This is your inclined plane.

Now place the double cone on the canes near the lower ends, or the apex of the triangle formed by the canes and the larger book, and you will be surprised to see the circular body going uphill in defiance of the laws of Nature.

The explanation is simple. Owing to the continually increasing distance between the canes, the axis of the cone (where its centre of gravity lies) sinks lower and lower, and the whole thing is a curious illusion.

Striking a Light.

A GAME often played by French schoolboys, but very little known in this country, is the following:

Select two persons from the party present and make them kneel on the floor facing each other, at such a distance that they can just touch finger-tips by stretching out their arms.

To one of them is now handed a match-box and to the other a match. Each player is now to take hold of his right foot with his right hand, and the game is to strike the match. It *can* be done, but it is not easy.

Breaking Off the Heel of a Pipe.

THE ordinary clay pipe has, under the bowl, a projection or heel which it would seem impossible to break from the opposite side of an ordinary table without injuring the bowl or breaking the stem. Yet it can be done with ease after two or three attempts.

Break off a piece of the stem—about a couple of inches will do—and place it on the table so that it projects a little over the edge. Ask a friend to hold the pipe obliquely, heel upwards, and the bowl higher than the end of the stem; he can do this by inserting his little finger in the bowl. Now get your piece in proper line with the stem of the pipe, and strike it forcibly and well with the palm of your hand. The piece will fly across the table, along the stem, and break the heel clean off.

This seems amazing at first sight, but anyone with a "straight eye" can do it with very little practice.

The Self-Peeling Banana.

THIS trick is based upon the same principle as that of making an egg go voluntarily through the neck of a decanter, although the hole may be smaller than the egg. An explanation of the principle will enable the reader to perform both tricks.

Take a decanter and drop a piece of lighted paper inside; this is to warm the interior and create a partial vacuum. Then quickly and tightly close the opening by stuffing into it the end of a hard-boiled egg without a shell—or a raw egg after the shell has been softened by means of vinegar. At the end of a few seconds the egg will become thinner and longer, and will shortly drop into the decanter with a pop, the noise being due to the entry of the air into the decanter.

For the self-peeling banana take a bottle and warm the interior air by pouring a little alcoholic spirit into it, and dropping a lighted match in the spirit. Before the interior can become cool stop up the neck by thrusting in the end of a banana, on the skin of which you have made some longitudinal cuts. The banana, which must be quite ripe, will be drawn into the bottle, leaving its skin behind.

Knives to Grind.

YOU can perform this trick at the tea-table. The object is to deceive the people sitting opposite you.

Offer to grind their knives by a special system—patented, of course. Place your plate on your knees, and keep it in a vertical position by letting it rest against the edge of the table, so that about an inch and a half or two inches of it can be seen by the person seated on the other side, the hollow side of the plate towards yourself. Hold the knife on the edge of the plate, as you would hold it on a grindstone, and make the plate shake by the slightest trembling of your knees.

To those sitting opposite you the plate will actually appear to be going round at a great rate, and they will be surprised at your extraordinary dexterity.

Games with a Chalk Line.

THE long reach is not at all a bad game, and it gives occasion for considerable skill and consequent emulation. A line is drawn on the floor, and the player, who holds a piece of chalk in his right hand, stands with his toes to this line, from which he is not allowed to withdraw them.

He has to stoop down, resting the left hand on the ground, and to shift that hand along as far as he can without moving the feet. He now stretches out the right hand, and makes a mark on the floor, as far away as he can reach, without losing balance, or going so far as not to be able to recover himself and get up again without touching ground with the right hand. The player who can make the most distant chalk mark, wins.

With the same chalk line can be played another amusing game. An empty tin—like a condensed milk tin, or a ball, is placed on the ground about ten yards from the mark; and the player, blindfolded, is to walk to the tin, but without touching it with his feet.

When he judges himself to be within reach, he is to kick the ball or tin, as the case may be, as hard as possible. The ludicrous errors of the players in judging the distance, and their violent kicks at nothing at all, form a source of rich amusement to the bystanders.

Here's a Good Game.

WITH the coming of the long winter evenings, and the entertainments and parties which they bring, comes the old question: "Isn't there something new that we can play?"

It is always difficult to find anything altogether fresh and original, and some of the older games, a trifle worked over and freshened up, will be found quite as interesting as anything else.

For instance, there are many word games, but not one of them is quite like the little fun-maker known as the "word rhapsody."

In playing this game each of the guests is called upon to choose one word. This word is written upon a little card furnished by the hostess. It may be an adjective, a verb, a common or proper noun, or any other word that may suggest itself. The cards are then gathered up, and the hostess writes all the words on a large piece of white paper with a blue pencil, so that, when hung up, it can be seen all over the room.

Then each guest is invited to write a short story in which every one of the words appears, all of them being used grammatically and in a manner to make sense. The time of work should be limited to ten minutes. When the stories are complete the authors are invited to read them aloud, or the hostess collects and reads them herself. The results are often very amusing. The rhapsody also makes a good school exercise.

The "A.R." Xmas Number.

THE *Athletic Record Christmas Number* is now on sale.

Here are some of the principal contents:

"THE GROWTH OF PROFESSIONALISM, AND ITS EFFECT ON ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL," by G. O. Smith.

"THE FUTURE OF RUGBY FOOTBALL," by Frank Mitchell.

"A REVIEW OF THE CYCLING YEAR," by A. J. Wilson ("Faed").

"ATHLETICS IN 1897," by J. E. Dixon.

"WON ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD," a Sporting Story, written and illustrated by E. E. Goodwin ("Gee").

"WAITS," by Austin Fryers.

"KING SENKA AND THE BICYCLE," by W. St. G. Drennan, illustrated by J. J. Proctor.

"FOOTBALL IN AMERICA," by W. A. Penn.

This article will be illustrated, and is specially interesting in view of the recent agitation in the States for the abolition of the game.

These are only a few of the good things, but I imagine they will be enough to whet the appetite. The articles by G. O. Smith and Frank Mitchell are specially written for us, and are certain to cause a great sensation.

[NO]W READY. THE ATHLETIC RECORD XMAS N[O.] 2D.

The Magic Cross.

TAKE a crystal glass with a good "ring" about it, fill it nearly full with water. Cut a stiff paper cross, the arms to be at right angles, and place it on the glass, turning the arms down over the edge to keep it in position. Then try this experiment:

Rub your moistened finger on the outside of the glass. As usual, you will hear a sound, but you will also observe this phenomenon: if you rub the surface under one of the arms of the cross, this latter will not move; but if you rub the glass *between* the arms, the cross will begin to turn slowly, as if in obedience to some magic influence, and will continue to turn until the arm is over the spot touched by the finger. You can, by shifting your finger, make the cross turn all round the glass.

The Obedient Egg.

TAKE a raw egg and empty it by means of pin holes. As soon as it is dry inside, fill it a quarter full of fine sand, and then with a little white wax seal up the apertures. Its likeness to an ordinary egg is now complete.

Next time boiled eggs are served at breakfast take your prepared egg and substitute it for one that is given you. Then you may safely announce that your egg is ready to obey your lightest word. You can place it at will in any position you desire. It will stand on the edge of a knife or the rim of a glass, no matt[er] whether you put it sideways or endways.

In the last case you will cause all the more astoni[sh]ment because it will seem to trespass against the l[aw] of gravity. The only precaution you need observe [is to] tap the imitation egg gently, so as to cause the sa[nd it] contains to settle each time at the bottom, and thu[s you] will get it to assume any position you wish. It w[ill ap]pear like magic. This is the obedient egg.

The Disobedient Egg.

Now the disobedient egg is quite of another [kind;] it is prepared as follows: You must introdu[ce an] ounce or so of very fine shot through the hole, toge[ther] with a little powdered sealing-wax. Then warm it gently over the stove. You will thus have a fixed centre of gravity in your egg which will cause the most contradictory appearances. It will prove a perfect fund of laughter.

No matter how you pretend to pose it, the weight of the lead at one end will draw it away from its position just as soon as you leave it to its own devices.

Try to Do This.

TAKE a light chair, and place it with its back to the wall. Stand in front of it, facing the wall, with the toes about a foot from the front feet of the chair, and, placing one hand on each side of the chair, lean forward until the top of your head touches the wall. The problem is to lift the chair from the floor, and, without moving the feet, to take the head away from the wall and stand upright.

Simple as this appears, it is impossible! Very few people, as you will find, would anticipate any difficulty in doing this. Get them to try and their opinion will be changed.

This trick is, of course, very like the old one of standing against a wall sideways, with the shoulder and one foot touching the wall. It is then impossible to raise the outside foot without losing one's balance and falling away from the wall.

Water and Wine Changing Places.

TAKE two glasses, and fill them to the brim, one with water, and the other with wine. Place over the top of the one containing water a piece of tulle which you have previously wetted; the tulle is cut a little larger than the top of the glass, so that it can be turned down all round over the edge.

Lay your left hand flat on the top of the glass, take hold of the foot with the right hand, and turn it over as quickly as you can (in order to avoid the entrance of air); withdraw your left hand very gently in a horizontal direction, and you will find that the tulle will keep the water in the glass without allowing a drop to run out. Very little practice will enable you to do this easily and successfully.

Now carefully place the inverted glass of water on [the] glass of wine, and you will see little streaks of [red] mingle with the water. Gradually the water will turn red, and the wine become paler. The fact is, the contents of the two glasses are changing places, [and the] operation continues until the exchange is com[plete]. Of course, both glasses must be of [equal size, and as] full as po[ssible].

Turn to page 397. Th[e] ...

HOW JEWS KEEP CHRISTMAS.

THEY DO SO IN FEASTING AND MAKING MERRY.

THE Jew is a holiday-loving person, and no wonder; for to him a holiday—and he has plenty of them—always means a great feast. At the time of his multitudinous festivals it is especially praiseworthy for him to eat his fill of the best, or rather, as much of it as his means will allow; for every time he eats he gives blessings; and what better pastime could there be? Indeed, there is a tradition that on a certain day of one of his high festivals he should recite a hundred blessings.

It is clear that he must on this great occasion regale himself with many tempting delicacies besides those provided at his meals, for after about eighty turns at pastries, wines, and fruits, only something very special indeed will make him rise to the occasion and do the other twenty "goes." We do not pretend, however, that he carries out the letter of this Rabbinical tradition; yet he keeps the spirit of it before his mind.

With such a training then, it is small wonder that at Christmas time the Jew looks upon the festivities of his neighbours with longing eyes. He says in effect:

"Lo, the nations hold high festival! Behold they eat and drink and rejoice! Ye may see in the shops fine fat 'geese,' yea, even 'turkeys'; neither of which are forbidden to the Children of Israel when killed according to our law. Also is there wonderful pudding. All these things are exceeding good. Let us also have a goodly feed."

And he does. The Jews have their turkeys and geese, and their pudding. The Ghetto market place is almost as busy as it is on the days preceding some lesser Jewish celebration. The butchers in Petticoat Lane decorate their shops with mistletoe and holly. In short, the Jews join in the national holiday.

But—and here is the distinctive feature of the Jewish Christmas celebration—the Jews do not wish it to appear that they are celebrating the birth of a Messiah in Whom they do not believe. So on December 25th, those who give a feast, indulge in the irreverent game of cards.

This removes from the day any semblance of religious solemnity which should always accompany a properly observed Christmas celebration.

As a general rule, the Jews are specially fond of a game of solo whist, and many of them are in the habit of playing that game once or twice weekly throughout the year. But they make a special virtue of it at Christ-

Quite Right Too.

"GEORGE," exclaimed Mrs. Younghusband, with a radiant smile, "baby has a tooth."

"Has he?" was the response, in a tone which betrayed no emotion.

"You don't seem surprised."

"I'm not surprised. All babies have first teeth. If ours didn't have any I'd manage to work up some excitement, perhaps."

"I thought you'd be ever so pleased and happy about it."

"No; I don't see that it's any occasion for especial congratulations. The baby has my deepest sympathy."

"What for?"

"For having the first tooth. He has just struck the opening chapter of a long story of trouble. Pretty soon he'll have other teeth."

"Of course he will."

"Every one he cuts will hurt him. Then his second teeth will come and push these out. That will hurt him again. Some of the new ones will grow crooked, likely as not, as he will have to go to the dentist and have a block and tackle adjusted to them to pull them into line. Then he'll cut his wisdom teeth. They will hurt a lot. After that he'll have to go to the dentist and let him drill holes and hammer until his face feels like a great palpitating stone quarry. I shouldn't like him to go through life without teeth. But I must say that I don't see any occasion for the customary hilarity over an event that means so much in the way of sorrow and humiliation."

THE UNFAIR PAIR.—Wife (enthusiastically): "How much do you think we took in at the bazaar?"

Husband (quietly): "How many, you mean."

FRIEND (leaving the office with the broker): "I say, old man, you didn't lock your safe."

Broker: "No, I never do. It cost £60, and I don't want burglars to spoil it, trying to get out what little there is in it."

AN EXTENDED BUSINESS.—"What! you begging here, too? I saw you only a little while ago begging in the Strand?"

"Yes, sir, I have a branch establishment there!"

"WHY have you abandoned the typewriter?" asked the editor of the literary lady.

"Simply because I can't do any good work without [illegible] of a lead pe[illegible]"

Which Shall Go First?

WHICH of us, darling, shall know some day
The pain of the parting hour,
When one shall go, and other stay,
Compelled by death's dread power?
We know not to which the summons will come
Nor which will be left alone,
Longing for loving hands to clasp
And lips to meet our own.

How could I linger if you should go?
How the days would lengthen and wait,
And the time past weary and dreary and slow
With its burden early and late!
Could I ever forget? Would some moments bring
A healing draught to me,
To lighten or deaden the terrible sting
Of my loss and misery?

How I'd long for a gentle, caressing touch
Of your fingers over my hair;
Of the loving tone and tenderness
That help me all trials to bear.
Oh, I'd pray for the terror of parting to pass,
And for death to first call upon me,
But I cannot wish, darling, that I should go
And leave all the sorrow for thee.

But when one goes, if the other knows
That the gates have shut them in,
Safe from the sorrow that waits for those
Who die in toils of sin,
And the other is treading the narrow path
That leads to the blessed gate,
They can toil and struggle and love on still,
And safely hope and wait.

A Greeting to *P.W.* from Across the Sea.

WE find the following in an esteemed Hungarian contemporary. Our natural modesty must not be allowed to prevent us from recognising the fact that this is an exceedingly delicate compliment to us. That will be evident, even to the unitiated, from the frequent occurrence of the letters P and W.

PRYWPOWIESCI.

Pracuj nawet w poniedzialki,
Nie pij wina, ni gorzalki,
Co oszczedzisz, akladaj w skrzyhie
Potem rachuj jak rok minie.

We thank our friend for these kindly words, and can only add:

Ajkji wuczy dzyb to rok
Vanjz kachni intadzi kerhok.

A Pavement Diary.

THE DOINGS OF ONE WHO KEEPS IT.

P.W. recently stumbled across a pavement artist, who has certainly "struck oil" in a novel direction. Our hero presents his patrons and the public with vivid representations of the world's doings in coloured crayons; and secures an appreciative audience, which his ingenuity and talent certainly deserves.

"The idea occurred to me," said the knight of the crayons, "while looking over a number of old illustrated weeklies. 'Why not,' thought I, 'do something of the sort myself? It would be a decided novelty to picture the startling occurrences of the week on the pavement.' And with this idea uppermost I wended my way to my usual pitch, determined to test the notion there and then.

"That week, I remember, there had been a startling midnight elopement; the daughter of a wealthy Society gentleman having decamped with one of the male servants; a shipwreck and mine explosion also furnished me with abundance of material. I represented the lady of disobedient tendencies making good her escape, while a fitful moon cast misty shadows through the trees; a mysterious figure awaiting the heroine in the distance.

"This picture, even more than the shipwreck and explosion, made my name; for, though the latter were extensively elaborated and horrified, the elopement secured the lion's share of attention. Luckily, the following week there was a famous murder case, and all the harrowing details were duly recorded on the pavement.

"Requested by a gentleman—whose interest in me commenced when I departed from the conventional methods of my tribe—to elaborate on the affair, and bring imagination into prominent play, I netted a considerable sum; and week by week I attracted more and more notice.

"Then I added pictorial effects of the plays and operas at the leading theatres, and the success I achieved exceeded even my wildest expectations. Now, each week brings with it a series of excitements, which I illustr[illegible]arly as the pictorial papers; and my [illegible] unusual interest in my representation [illegible]

MARRIAGE BY MACHINERY.

BY WHICH CONJUGAL HAPPINESS IS GUARANTEED.

IT is not a penny in the slot machine, however, which at the present time threatens to govern the whole of our earthly career, and for all anybody knows our post-mortem state as well, for penny coffins are already an absolute fact, one of the Unions having contracted for their supply at this rate.

It is the case of marriage by scientific machinery, which is intended to prevent the possibility of the wedding of two people who would eventually find not happiness, but misery, in the "blissful state."

The inventor of this remarkable machine is Professor Keeley, whose name has been so prominently before the world in connection with his perpetual motor machine.

According to his latest discovery, every person has a musical chord which dominates him, and which is as distinct from every other note as is the individuality of its possessor from that of every other personality on earth.

If the key notes of two people form a harmony, marriage will be "one grand sweet song," while if the notes are in discord marriage will be all that the New Woman claims for it.

If a couple wish to know what is the relation of their respective chords, they enter a circle defined with metal, and each holds a small bar attached to a tuning fork which their grasp sets vibrating. In this way their chords are sounded and their notes registered. The scientist listens to the notes to find out whether they produce "a shrieking discord," or a harmony that would charm the ear of a musician.

If harmony, marry, and be happy ever after.

If discord, separate, and be happy ever after—with somebody else.

The instrument has been tried with three thousand couples, and has never made a mistake.

That is the statement of the inventor, who certainly ought to know. It need hardly be added, he believes, that the matter should not be left in the hands of the people, but should become a governmental question.

But this machine, which has been named the Negative Sympathetic Register, possibly because it registers positive sympathy, does more than this, for it shows which of the two will dominate the *menage*. If the man's chord, for instance, is 66 2-3, and the woman's 33 1-3, the man will rule, and all will be well; but if the figures are registered the other way, then, though the man may wear the kilt, the woman will wear the what's-its-name.

All For Her.

"OH, yes, I think I'm beginning to pick up the game now," chuckled the little man in the railway carriage, as he hugged his packages, and smiled at his friend who sat next to him.

"I don't understand, my friend."

"No? Well, you see, it's a kind of open question at home as to which of us, the wife or I, is head of the house. Last birthday she had saved up enough of my own money to buy me some presents. What I got was a diamond ring, so small that she had to wear it, a lot of toilet accessories for the dressing table, and a pair of kid gloves, that happened to be her size."

"Wouldn't it be well to assert yourself just for once, you know?"

"Well, as to-morrow's Christmas Day I thought I'd buy a few presents for her; they're in those bundles. There's a pair of boots made to my measurement, three neckties, half-a-dozen big linen handkerchiefs, a briar-wood pipe, and four pounds of smoking tobacco. They're all for her," and the little man laughed till he dropped most of his packages.

Two or three days later the same two happened to ride up to town together, and the little man still had his packages with him.

"How did your wife enjoy the presents?" asked the sympathetic man.

"I don't see," was the reply, "what business you have inquiring into my private affairs, sir. If I choose to get these things exchanged I don't have to advertise the fact."

"WHAT are you doing," asked the convict of the reporter, who was writing an account of the prison buildings.

"I'm taking notes."

"Humph! That's what brought me here."

THE WORST OF THIS MUDDY WEATHER.—Mrs. Caller: "So your husband is out cycling? Why aren't you scouring the country with him on your bicycle?"

Mrs. Wheeler: "Oh, I have to stay at home to scour the country off his clothes."

MRS. YOUNG (proudly): "The landlord was here to-day; I gave him the quarter's rent, and showed him the baby."

Young (who was kept awake last night): "It would have been better, my dear, if you had given him the baby and shown him the quarter's rent."

otball competition, the l[illegible] u have never seen before.

How to Sing with Expression.

IT was a musical evening. There was a sort of interval between parts first and second, and in the midst of the conversation in progress, one of the assembly, a little deaf, leant over to his neighbour and softly remarked:

"Miss Brown Smith unquestionably is giving much expression to her song, but I can't hear a sound of her utterances. How does she sing?"

The one addressed glanced in the designated direction, and perceived Miss Brown Smith's mouth open and shut with apparently unwonted rapidity. He looked at her a moment, and then said, with a smile:

"She is not singing, my friend; she is only chewing jujubes."

Room for Improvement.

THE old man examined the tandem critically.

"So you take the girls riding on that, do you?" he asked at last.

The young man smiled and nodded.

"And you put the girl on that front seat and you sit on the back one?" persisted the old man inquiringly.

"That's it," replied the young man.

"Well, I s'pose it's all right," the old man said, with a sigh, "but it never would have done in my day. When I was a young lad and wanted to take a pretty girl riding, I never would have put her on a seat ahead of me that way unless her head swung on a pivot and could be turned round so's it wouldn't be so wretchedly unhandy."

A Standard of Fitness.

HE is a man of irascible impulses and a bluntness of speech which wins him many enemies. At the card table he was greatly annoyed by a lady who insisted on paying more attention to conversation than she did to the game.

"I see no reason," she was saying, "why a woman should not assume just as much importance in all affairs as men do."

"I see none myself," replied the irascible man, with unusual gentleness, "provided she is intellectually qualified to do so."

"And what would you suggest as the test of her mental fitness?"

"As good a test as any would be her ability to remember what are trumps."

Puzzling the Mind Reader.

"I HEAR that you and your wife went to the Scrubbs' party and they had a mind-reading *séance*. Did you have your thoughts read?"

"They tried it on, but they didn't succeed with me. I'm too old a bird to be caught like that, James!"

"How was it?" queried Millson.

"It happened that my old flame, Polly, was there, and I knew she was trying to get even with me. When the mind-reader started operations, she put Scrubbs up to getting me to have my thoughts read and she kept her eyes on me so that I should think about her. There would have been trouble with my wife if that had come off, but I spoilt it."

"How did you manage it?"

"Why, I kept thinking of the French word for 'lady' (*dame*), because that's the only foreign word I know, and that did him. He said he must decline to repeat in polite society the profane language I was using, and they all looked shocked. No, my boy, I wasn't going to let Polly get the best of me in that way!"

SCHOOL INSPECTOR: "Can any of you boys remember a pleasant winter in recent years?"

Chorus: "Yes, in 1890, our teacher was ill nearly all the time."

"MAY I print a kiss on your cheek," I asked,
She nodded her sweet permission;
So we went to press, and I rather believe
I printed a large edition.

FATHER (at breakfast): "How did young Snodgrass like my turning off the gas at nine o'clock last night?"

Daughter (surprised): "Why, papa, I—he—we—didn't know that you did."

LITTLE WILLIE: "Mamma, it seems to me turkeys must be awfully wicked."

Mamma: "Why, Willie?"

Little Willie: "Well, when they dies, they always go to a hot place."

"I COME to tell you," said the Margate tenant to his landlord after the recent gale, "that my cellar is full of water."

"Well," responded the landlord indignantly, "what do you expect to get for £2 a month, a cellar of beer?"

RESULT OF COMPETITION No. 9.

The £25 Won.

No competitor succeeded in correctly naming all the results in this competition. The £25 has therefore gone to

Mr. Frederick Cox, 60, Edentown, - Carlisle. -

whose was the only attempt with one mistake.

THE GREATEST

FOOTBALL COMPETITION

ON EARTH.

PRIZES OF

£1,000, £100, - £25. -

The Football Clubs named below play on Saturday, January 1st. To the reader who names the correct result of these matches we will pay the sum of

One Hundred Pounds.

In the event of two or more being correct the money will be divided.

If no competitor gives a quite correct solution £25 will be divided as consoling gifts amongst those nearest. If between now and the close of the football season any one competitor wins the hundred pound prize in full three times, we will make him a further present of

One Thousand Pounds.

Every week we shall offer these prizes so long as the interest of our readers is sustained in it, and as often as a prize is won, just as often shall we pay it.

Football Coupon No. 12.

Matches to be played on Saturday, January 1st.
Cross out which you consider will be the losing clubs. For a draw don't cross out either.

1 Sheffield Wednesday	v	2 Notts Forest.
3 Liverpool	v	4 W. Bromwich Albion.
5 Sunderland.	v	6 Preston North End.
7 Bury	v	8 Stoke.
9 Blackpool	v	10 Woolwich Arsenal.
11 New Brompton	v	12 Sheppey United.
13 Southampton	v	14 Bristol City.
15 Reading	v	16 Chatham.
17 Southport Central	v	18 Eacup.
19 Celtic	v	20 Rangers.
21 Corinthians	v	22 Queen's Park.
23 Devonport Albion	v	24 Gloucester (R.U.)
25 Bristol	v	26 Newport (R.U.)
27 Leigh	v	28 Warrington (N.U.)
29 Wakefield Trinity	v	30 Batley (N.U.)

Name .....

Address .....

CUT OUT COUPON AND POST TO US UNFOLDED.

Things to Remember.

1. You may send as many coupons as you like, either from *P.W.* or the *Athletic Record*. In this latter paper will be found valuable hints as to who is likely to win.
2. Nobody must enter for this competition who will not abide by the Editor's final decision.
3. All coupons must reach us not later than Friday, December 31st, first post. Any envelope bearing a postmark later than Thursday, December 30th, will be disqualified.
4. Competitors should cut out the above coupon, score it as directed, put their name and address on the space provided, and send to "FOOTBALL," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

For the convenience of those who wish to make more than one attempt we have prepared separate coupons, which we will send by post to applicants at the rate of twenty for a shilling. Those who want them must send postal orders for as many sheets of twenty as they require, and must inclose a stamped addressed envelope. Coupons will be sent by return and are made available for any week.

APPLICATIONS FOR COUPONS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO C. ARTHUR PEARSON LIMITED, HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.

His Second Commission.

A GOOD story is told of a once swell young officer who had been compelled by adverse circumstances to throw up the commission he held in a crack regiment and to enlist as a private soldier.

He found it difficult, however, to forget his former rank, and one day, on being ordered to perform some necessary duty with the spade, to which he strongly objected, he remonstrated.

"But, sergeant," he drawled, "'er—you—'er forget I've held Her Majesty's commission, and ——"

The sergeant cut him short.

"And, now, young 'un, you've got to hold Her Majesty's shovel."

Noble Child!

WITH a look full of compassionate congratulation, a noted London divine bent over a small gamin yesterday, while the other soiled arabs of the street paused at a distance and looked on with interest.

"I saw it all, my boy," he said. "You did well. I saw the little wretch strike you, and saw the noble forbearance with which you held your hand. Believe me, such conduct will not go unrewarded. In itself it is no mean reward. Do you not feel better now than you would if you had struck him back?"

The child rubbed the back of his hand across his neglected nose. Then he raised his head proudly:

"Rather!" he said. "If I'd hit him back yer can lay 'e'd a bin walkin' on my face now!"

Neckties to Match the Eyes.

"HAVE you any neckties?" inquired the dandified young man, addressing the proprietor. Then, turning to his companion, he said with a slight lisp: "I have a fad for getting neckties as souvenirs of every place I visit. It's my own idea don't you know."

"What colour do you want?" inquired the proprietor surveying his customer through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh—ah—I'm very fond of having them to match the colour of my eyes," said the young man languidly opening his small orbs to their widest extent.

"Haven't got any neckties that will do, then," said the proprietor, shaking his head decidedly. "I've got plain blue ones, real pale blue ones, but none with *edges*."

They Weren't Great Business Men.

MICKY DOOLAN and Patrick O'Connor were brought before the magistrate for having violently assaulted each other.

It was explained that they had invested five shillings, their joint capital, in the purchase of a small keg of whisky to retail for twopence a glass at the local fair. This exhausted all their money except a solitary twopence, belonging to Micky. He became thirsty on the road to the fair, and purchased a glass of whisky from his partner.

Patrick became thirsty in his turn, and handed back the twopence for a drink. Micky paid it over again, and so the process continued until the keg was empty, and the two proprietors were decidedly drunk. As each had paid twopence for every drink, and there were fifty drinks in the keg, each agreed that there ought to be 8s. 4d. to divide between them.

As, in fact, there was only twopence, each accused the other of stealing the proceeds. Words led to blows, and the assaults were the consequence.

BEFORE AND AFTER.

HE flew upon the wings of love
To buy his girl a diamond ring;
But after they were married, he
Flew back to see how much 'twould bring.

MOTHER (at the museum): "That, Tommy, is a mummy found in a tomb in South America."

Tommy (eyeing the doubled-up specimen): "Mother, he must have died of eating green apples."

"WILLIE," said the visitor, "what is your ambition?"

"I'd like," said the boy, putting down his yellow-coloured story of the plains, "to have people tremble like leaves at the mere mention of my name."

MRS. JONES: "I wonder what it is that makes baby so wakeful?"

Mr. Jones (savagely): "Why, it's hereditary, of course—this is what comes of your sitting up at nights waiting for me!"

BILKINS: "You look unhappy."

Wilkins: "Y-e-s; I-er-married a shop-girl, you know."

"A charming little woman she is, too."

"Yes, I know; bless her! But every time she [illegible] me she cries, 'Cash!'"

This week's SUNDAY READER is full of splendidly illustrated Christmas articles, Christmas stories, and Christmas anecdotes.

USING UP AN OX.

OF the hundreds and thousands of people who have visited the recent Cattle Show at the Agricultural Hall, or ga ed critically or curiously at -ize oxen in different parts of the country, only a small proportion have any proper idea of the manner in which the carcass of an ox is utilised.

It does not occur to the vast majority of them, as they think with pleasant anticipation of the enjoyment of a joint of juicy roast beef, that from the animal's horns to his hoofs every portion is turned into account in this utilitarian age, and that it may be said with truth that not even a hair is wasted.

In the days of our grandfathers the disposal of a bull was a comparatively simple matter; it was distributed into three parts—the meat, to be eaten; the hide, to be made into leather; and the offal, to be thrown away. In those days the butcher alone was concerned in the distribution of the carcase, but we have changed all that now, and the chemist and others have a hand in it, with the result that every scrap is made use of in a profitable way.

It is almost bewildering to think of what becomes of the truculent bull after he has disappeared within the portals of what was once known as the slaughter-house, which is now being called the *abattoir*—a designation which is regarded as more in accordance with present refinement for the simple reason that, being French, its signification is not generally comprehended. At the expiration of a few minutes the first step in the final distribution of the animal has been completed; it has been killed, stripped of its hide, quartered, and the meat portion hung on hooks. From that moment begins the processes which result in the various portions of the beast being spread all over the globe.

The meat, which we will regard as the principal part, is distributed far and wide. The prince and the pauper sit down to partake of the flesh of the same animal's; the sailor at sea and his wife at home may, at different times, have for their dinners parts of the bull which has scared the latter as it was being driven through the streets.

The sirloin and the baron are for royalty and the rich; the harder steak goes to the prisons and the almshouses—some of it, with the neck and the shin bones, going to the inhabitants of the squalid courts and alleys, when they can get together enough money to indulge in such luxuries; the tail is served up in oxtail soup in the fashionable restaurants; the round is for the sailor's "salt horse"; and so on through various grades of life, and among all sorts and conditions of people. A bull weighing 1,200lb. will in all probability yield from 700lb. to 800lb. of meat.

The meat having been disposed of, the remainder of the animal's carcase is taken in hand. The hide is quickly dealt with, being sold to the tanners for leather.

Special dealers buy up the tongues, which are tinned for the most part. There is but a limited demand for the brains, but the livers find a ready sale; while the lining of the paunch makes its reappearance as the succulent dainty known as "tripe." From the pure fat the chemist has taught us to extract a first-class oil, which is largely exported to Holland, and, later on, comes back to us in the shape of butter. From the residue of the fatty substances we get inferior kinds of oil.

Certain bones, selected from the pile, are boiled to obtain gelatine, which forms the basis of cheap jellies. Stearine, used in the production of candles, and for certain sweetmeats, is the product left from the process of pressing out oil. The horns are sold to the makers of combs and fancy goods.

The hoofs are boiled, and the result of the process is the valuable commodity known as neat's foot oil. After having been boiled, the hoofs are also used in the manufacture of horn ornaments. It must not be forgotten that the hoof also enters into the composition of glue.

Everything that is now remaining—blood, entrails, etc.—is made into fertilising material—by no means the least valuable commodity obtained from the bull.

The diagram shows at a glance the destination of the different parts of the animal which furnishes the national joint of the Englishman. The food of the prince and the prisoner, the dinners at the West-end restaurant and the East-end coffee-shop, the Society lady's sweetmeats and the factory girl's horn comb or hairpin, the salt junk of Jack Tar and the ox-tail soup of the First Lord of the Admiralty and the opulent shipowner, all are directly traceable to the usually patient ox.

PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE.

THE millionaire, Mr. E. T. Hooley, possesses twenty thousand acres of land distributed over six British counties.

MR. RUSKIN, the great writer, draws £400 a month in literary royalties and yet no book of his has ever been translated in a foreign language.

MISS DECIMA MOORE, the young actress, is, as her name implies, her father and mother's tenth child. She is one of the most ardent cyclists now on the stage, and she and her husband spend every moment of their spare time in making up cycling parties in the neighbourhood of London.

GENERAL SAUSSIER, the Commander-in-Chief of the French army, is said to be one of the stoutest men in the service; but although he finds a certain difficulty in jumping on and off the high-spirited horses, always provided by the thoughtful Government for French commanding officers, he has an amount of extraordinary mental energy, and is said to be one of the best strategists in Europe.

THE Sultan of Turkey is always seen attired in pale brown garments. The Emperor of Austria affects grey. The young German Emperor has what may be called a loud taste in clothes, and is never so happy as when wearing the showiest of uniforms or hunting costumes; indeed, when attired in the latter he looks as though he had stepped out of Drury Lane pantomime, so extraordinary and fantastic is his get-up on these occasions. The Emperor of Russia, on the other hand, likes the simplest, darkest form of undress uniform, and he habitually wears that which became so familiar in all the photographs of his late father.

MR. J. LAWSON JOHNSTON will soon rival the German Emperor in his love for yachting; not only is he now the owner of the Prince of Wales' famous boat, the *Britannia*, but he lately bought for close on £12,000 Mrs. Langtry's lovely floating home, the *White Ladye*. Few people are aware that the original cost of the yacht was £40,000, but as the *White Ladye* could always be let for £1,000 a month during the yachting season, she proved on the whole a good investment. The celebrated beauty's own suite of cabins were the most luxurious in the world, and included a white marble dressing-room with all the fittings of silver.

THE Duke of Beaufort is a chip of the old sporting nobility of Great Britain. He began his turf career when he was quite a boy, and lately celebrated the fortieth year of his stewardship of the Jockey Club. Few men know more about horses than does the Master of Badminton, and yet he has never been lucky enough to win the Derby. He is the editor of a well-known sporting library, and can claim to be an all-round authority on every kind of British sport. The Duke of Beaufort's heir is curiously enough the only son of Lady Henry Somerset, the great temperance reformer; this is owing to the fact that his own eldest son, Lord Worcester, though married, has only a daughter.

THE young Tsar of Russia is not the only European potentate the state of whose health is a matter of international concern. Robust as he usually is, Kaiser William the Second sometimes suffers from a malady akin to that from which the Tsar suffers; the pains in his head are occasionally violent. The King of Italy is an occasional victim to a constitutional illness which defies the doctors; he had an attack of it lately, when the authors of inspired paragraphs in the Italian papers were suspiciously zealous in denying that there was anything the matter. Finally, the ruler of "China in Europe," which means Austria, is much feebler than many prominent men of greater age, advanced though he is in years.

THE King of Wurtemburg may certainly be said to be the only Knight of the Garter who is a hotel keeper as well as a Monarch. This has long been a tradition in his family, but not till lately was it discovered by the rulers of the beautiful little German Kingdom how profitable inn-keeping can become. When Peter the Great was travelling incognito through Europe he refused to stop anywhere but at an inn. To circumvent this whim the then King of Wurtemburg put a tavern sign outside one of the Royal Palaces, and, dressed as an inn-keeper, himself welcomed the Tsar. This royal personage's decendant now owns two large hotels, from which he is said to derive a revenue of £12,000 a year.

THE Duke and Duchess of York have not, so far, found it necessary to be so rigorous as are the other members of the Royal family when the delicate question arises of what presents to accept for their infant Royalties, "little David, Bertie, and the baby." It need hardly be said, however, that nothing in the shape of a disguised advertisement is allowed to penetrate into the York House nurseries—no "patent foods" or "unique rattles," can hope to effect an entrance, but gifts obviously kindly and disinterested in origin, are not rejected. Thus, each Royal child rejoices in a most beautiful quilt, embroidered in imitation of one of the famous Mecca curtains woven in Jerusalem; many of the legends from the Koran are reproduced in the design, and they are of historical interest and beauty.

RESULT OF THE

CHRISTMAS NUMBER PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION.

THE ingenuity of our readers was evidently underrated by us in setting this competition, for there are no fewer than ninety-five winners! The offer made was a Prize of £50 to the first person who sent a correct solution; but the whole of the solutions received in any one day were to be considered together, and in the event of two or more persons forwarding correct solutions in a day's post the prize to be divided. This was done, and the consequence is that the £50 have been divided by ninety-five, and the sum of 10s. 6d. forwarded to each winner, with the exception that half-a-crown extra has been posted to the person whose attempt was first dealt with. Their names and addresses:

Walter Derry, Gregory Street, Old Lenton, Nottingham; Miss M. A. Macalister, Torrisdale, Madingley Road, Cambridge; J. A. Lawson, 4 Star-bank Place, Trinity, Edinburgh; T. J. Smith, 11 St. John's Road, South Tottenham; A. C. Bowles, 86, Clifton Place, Shipley, Yorkshire; Miss C. S. Burnett, The Glebe, Sutton, Surrey; Miss Stella Insall, Roxby House, Rhyl, N. Wales; Mrs. R. Ashton, 6 Ariel Street, Eccles New Road, Weast, Manchester; Miss Taylor, 10 East Bank, Stamford Hill, N; Mrs. Carter, Horringer, near Bury St. Edmund's; W. Drinkwater, 139 Malins Road, Portsmouth; Hugh Wright, 537 Springburn Road, Glasgow; G. Greathouse, Dudley House, Warrior Square, St. Leonard's-on-Sea; A. Brinkman, 8 Quadrant Chambers, New Street, Birmingham; Miss J. R. Calder, Calderbank, Trinity Road, Edinburgh; D. Weth, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, Kent; G. Parbury, 5 Queen's Road, Erith, Kent; R. MacMillan, Institution for Deaf and Dumb, Newcastle-on-Tyne; F. Carter, Horringer, Bury St. Edmund's; Mrs. W. Epps, Manor House, Chipping Norton, Oxon; Leggett, 583 Seven Sisters Road, South Tottenham; R. J. Priest, 85 ...y Road, Southsea; Miss G. Goalem, 10 Randolph Place, Mount Florida, Glasgow; Mrs. A. S. Hunter, Kirkles, Broxburn, N.B.; S. A. Loxham, Wrexham; S. McKillips, Marino, Co. Down; A. C. Orchard, 109 Avondale Square, Old Kent Road, S.E.; R. J. Burgess, 36 Victoria Parade, Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston; T. H. Fletcher, 24 Charles Street, Neath, S. Wales; W. Rawlinson, 53 London Road, North End, Portsmouth; J. Kennedy, 68 Balsusney Road, Kirkcaldy, Fife, Scotland; W. Richardson, 43 East Road, Egremont, via Carnforth; I. B. Wilson, Vine Cottage, Grange over Sands, Lancashire; Mrs S. M. Pentelow, Loose, Maidstone; H. E. Smith, 1 Windsor Terrace, Ely, Cardiff; E. Wymbery, 247 Norderhill Road, Dulwich; Miss A. M. Carson, 5 Alderley Road, Hoylake, Cheshire; P. Chevne, 114 Spring Gardens, Abbey Hill, Edinburgh; A. J. Howlett, 8 Park Terrace, Church Road, Leyton; C. Carswell, Glenmorag Stepps, near Glasgow; J. G. Forbes, 9 Melville Terrace, Edinburgh; R. T. Blackburn, 74 Boldshay Street, Manerton Road, Bradford; W. R. Dowdell, 6 Osborne Street, Southsea; J. Warrilow, 4 Alexandra Street, Stone, Staffordshire; J. Whittington, Mag-dale Cottage, St. Helen's, Isle of Wight; Miss W. A. M. Davies, Rockspring Terrace, St. Luke's, Cork; Miss A. Turner, The Oaks, Ryde, Isle of Wight; P. E. Digan, 123 St. Mark's Road, North Kensington; W. F. Miller, 15 Eltham Valley Terrace, Wincheap Street, Canterbury; R. Newman, Stan-wardine, Arthur Road, Southampton; W. Harper, Cheapside, Peterhead; J. Hughes, 15 Royal Navel Place, Amersham Vale, New Cross, S.E.; A. L. Synderconbe, 1 Arthur Villas, Falkland Road, Hornsey; A. J. Spencer, 38 Arundel Street, Landport, Portsmouth; J. Biggs, Cliftonwood, Bristol; Carter, 1 Park Villas, London Road, North End, Portsmouth; R. J. Burgess, 36 Victoria Parade, Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston; J. Grandidge, 230 Edenfield Road, Rochdale; H. Christopher, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire; C. D. Walker, 13 Agnes Road, Northampton; A. J. Tyler, 8 Creek Road, March; G. M. Frean, Cranicombe, Babbacombe, Torquay; E. H. Chapelow, 14 Claypath, Durham; Miss N. Berette, Holly Cottage, 275 Bram-s'on Road, Burton-on-Trent; J. P. Cork, 14 Manningham Lane, Bradford; H. Hanson, 65 Cleveland Gardens, Barnes, S.W.; P. E. Walker, 19 Westley Avenue, Egremont, Cheshire; Sergt. W. A. Crew, 2nd Br. East Surrey Regt. Drop Redoubt, Dover; A. Chandler, 1 Lake Street, Hinksey, Oxford; E. G. Tye, Dane Mead, Cranbrook, Kent; A. S. Hunter, Kirkles, Broxburn; D. Gordon, 38, Rackham Street, North Kensington, London, W.; F. G. Currey, 167 Albert Road, Southsea; J. Tyson, 11 Edgehill Terrace, Bransty, Cumberland; G. A. Boyd, c.o Miss Deeves, 10 Orient Gardens, Lower Easton Street, Cliftonville, Belfast; A. R. Read, 11 Brighton Road, Southend; J. F. Furnace, 5 Banklands, Workington, Cumberland; G. Stenlake, Torpedo Depot, Keyham Factory, H.M. Dockyard, Devonport; B. J. Watkins, 54 Connaught Avenue, Mutley, Plymouth; B. Flower, 307 Regent Street, London, W.; Smith Terry, 29 Starkie Street, Keighley, Yorks; R. Hicks, H.M.S. *Pelorus*, Devonport; J. F. Paterson, 30 Upper Queen Street, Belfast; C. R. Chaplin, Castle Studios, Colwyn Bay; G. W. Mitchell, 59 Marchmont Road, Edinburgh; J. J. Demichy, 62 Patrick Street, Cork; F. J. Westcott, 15 Tavistock Place, Plymouth; F. Coventon, Lympstone, Exeter; Miss L. Hancock, Deane House, 108 Newport Road, Cardiff; Miss M. Beadnell, 48 Castletown Road, West Kensington; R. Salter, 16 Lorne Villas, Wilson Road, Southend-on-Sea; John C. Parker, 11 Leeson Park Avenue, Ranelagh, co. Dublin; J. Holloway, 23 Combe Terrace, Weycombe Park, London; R. E. Donnell, 37 Commons Street, Dublin; R. Standen, A.S.C., Aldershot.

The key of the picture will be found in *Short Stories* dated January 1st.

BEGINS TO-DAY.

The Lost Provinces.

HOW VANSITTART CAME BACK TO FRANCE.

A SEQUEL TO "AN AMERICAN EMPEROR."

NEW SERIAL STORY

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

CHAPTER I.

A KING AND TWO EMPERORS.

"So history repeats itself. The war of 1870 is to be fought again, and with, I fear, the same issue."

"Is there no hope of a peaceful settlement?"

"How can there be peace between a robber and his victim? Germany is resolved that France must be crushed. Crushed she will be to the utmost bounds of humiliation unless——"

"Unless you go back again, guv'nor, and take a hand in the game."

The interruption came from Arizona Jim, who was sitting with Vansittart and Evelyn in a canoe lying motionless on a silvery lake in the heart of the Adirondacks.

For a moment no one spoke. It would seem that this privileged adherent had blurted out the millionaire's secret thought, and the possibility alarmed Evelyn. In sharper tones than was her wont she cried, after a quick glance at her husband: "Don't say such foolish things, Bates. Your master has given enough to France without adding his life to the debt of gratitude. Twenty years hence you will suggest that Henry should follow in the same cause. The sole object of your existence is to seek danger and trouble."

The allusion to her three-year-old son softened her voice to breaking point. Her eyes glistened with tears as she looked wistfully from one to the other of her hearers.

Arizona Jim was astounded at this outburst. The use of his surname conveyed far more reproach than mere words. He worshipped Evelyn with dog-like fidelity, and now, in mute pain, he sought, with a look, encouragement from Vansittart. But Jerome steadily watched a spiral of smoke from his cigar curling into shapelessness in the still air. So Jim essayed to defend himself.

"Well, mum, there was a time when I used ter fool round lookin' for trouble. But I kinder thought that bad ole time had passed. The biggest trouble I didn't allow for, an' that is for you to be vexed with me. As for danger I'm sorter fixed in the notion as how it ain't in our hands. Kings an' sparrows run under the same rules."

"Oh, Jim, I'm not angry with you. But you don't understand—you don't understand," and Evelyn's repressed tears forthwith became downright sobs.

If her wayward mood amazed Bates, it was quite comprehensible to Jerome, who now silently admonished the other to leave matters where they were.

In very truth, the impulsive Texan had but placed into words the thought which for days past had thrown a shadow upon Evelyn's bright existence.

Sensational statements in the press, backed by the better informed confidential reports constantly supplied to Vansittart by the French Ambassador at Washington, proved beyond doubt that Germany was seeking a pretext for a rapid and irresistible attack upon her prosperous neighbour.

Bismarck's policy still prevailed in Berlin, though his domineering presence was removed from the council chamber. "A strong France is a menace to Teutonic aspirations." "In European disputes the bayonet is the court of appeal." "Blessed are those who possess." These were his aphorisms, and the hot-headed ruler of the German nation considered them to be still as vital to the longevity of his empire as in the troublous period when the first Chancellor proclaimed the reign of blood and iron.

France had thriven amazingly since Vansittart converted the arid Sahara into a panorama of cornlands and vineyards. The commercial prosperity of the people brought with it expansion in the trade marts of the world. Germany, soured by the uselessness of her own colonial efforts, experienced the novel sensation of being heedlessly elbowed to one side by her mercurial neighbour.

Frenchmen were taught reason by contentment. The Russian alliance was no longer coveted, bickerings against England became spasmodic and feeble, whilst the last man that Henri V. regarded as an antagonist was the German Emperor.

France, in her dream of peace, was even forgetting the Lost Provinces!

But the King and his advisers should have read the open book supplied by the recorded utterances of their greatest enemy.

"Every State," said Bismarck, "must recognise that its security rests on its own sword." Henri did well to enrich his people, but ill to neglect the safeguards of French independence.

And now that there was open alarm at the disclosure of German designs after years of secret and well-planned preparation, France was unready: heroic sacrifice might out-stay the impending doom.

These were the plain facts, divested of diplomatic trappings. On the surface there was an apparently common-place dispute concerning customs duties on German importations to the new African domain. Beneath lay the rancorous hatred of the Teuton for the Frank, intensified daily by battles fought in the counting-house, and territories won or lost in the world-wide kingdom of trade.

The New York press explained the situation with point and flippancy. "Germany must fight or bust," wrote one of the chief papers. "The Kaiser must either throttle France or be drummed out of power by an impoverished people famishing and mutinous. The nation is sinking beneath ever-increasing military burdens which must be met out of a falling revenue. The alternative, to the German Emperor's thinking, is simple. The rest of the world desires peace; he must have war—and every other interest but that of the house of Hohenzollern may go hang."

The London newspapers were more moderate. But even as they spoke of conciliation, they obviously dreaded the outbreak of hostilities at any hour. The TIMES—straining after an amicable settlement—could only suggest that an international committee should revise the offending tariff as a *modus vivendi* for twelve months. One might, with equal futility, ask the wolf to stay his spring until the lamb had sought the shelter of the fold.

No wonder, then, that Evelyn Vansittart was sad at heart in the midst of pleasant surroundings, or that her emotions were not in harmony with the joyous springtide in the hills. She knew full well that France, sore pressed, would, in the hour of extremity, appeal to the one man in whom the populace placed unbounded faith. And she herself would be the first to admit that duty and honour alike offered her husband but one course of action.

He must return. They must leave their Garden of Eden. It was bitter, and her soul rose in revolt against the warlike and unscrupulous Kaiser.

After all, money does not bring happiness. The millionaire and the man in the street are separated only by some bricks and mortar. Their lives are very similar when viewed through the telescopes of the gods.

Five minutes of quiet thought revealed the situation more clearly to Arizona Jim.

When Evelyn had calmed somewhat, in response to Jerome's half-jocular, half-sympathetic raillery, Jim ventured to say:

"It's like this, mum. It'll do no good for the guv'nor to fight, anyhow. This is a business for armies, an' big ones at that. But the French want someone to do the thinkin' for 'em. That's more'n half the game, an' allus hez been ever since the days of Nebbycodnezzer."

Jerome laughed outright at the extraordinary simile; even his wife smiled as she dried her eyes.

"Why on earth do you drag in Nebuchadnezzar, Jim?" cried Vansittart when he was able to speak.

"'Cos he thought he could live on grass, an' it kep' him goin' for seven bloomin' years."

The conceit put them in better humour. They were about to resume their interrupted fishing when Jerome caught sight of Harland walking towards them, down the hill on which stood their summer residence.

They watched him in silence until he reached the verge of the lake. Then he put his hands to his mouth and shouted:

"Cablegram for Evelyn!"

"A cablegram for me!" repeated Evelyn in astonishment. "From whom, I wonder? Paddle in at once, Jerry. Surely there is nothing amiss with mother, or aunt. I had a letter only yesterday. Why doesn't Dick call out its contents?" Had she been on shore she certainly would have examined the printed envelope to see if it gave any indications of the nature of the interior message.

She did not wait to land before she cried:

"Who is it from, Dick?"

"From the Queen of France."

"What is it about?"

"It will best convey its own message. Thinking it was from home I opened it. It is written in the private code by the King, Liancourt, and Jerome, so I have translated it and here is a fair copy."

Evelyn took the manuscript, and read it aloud:

DEAR AND TRUE FRIEND,—The expected has happened this time. Germany has forced a pretext for war upon us. Acting under the specific instructions of the Kaiser, a German gunboat accompanied a trading vessel to Gabes, and attempted to land a cargo of goods in defiance of our customs regulations. The officials invoked the aid of the captain of one of our warships on duty at the port, and he ordered the Germans to desist. This they refused to do unless compelled by force, whereupon our officer fired a blank cartridge by way of warning. It was sufficient, but there cannot be the slightest doubt that this paltry incident will be made a cause of war. We are, God knows, ill-prepared for a campaign, though we have strained every nerve to strengthen our resources since our enemy's cruel design became apparent. We are alone in this quarrel. We cannot expect England to interfere, and Russian friendship has suddenly become frozen. Oh, my dear Evelyn, do not you desert us! I ask you to spare your husband to aid us in this terrible crisis. I know not what to urge in behalf of my request, but the need of my beloved France impels me to proffer it, if necessary on my knees. The King or Liancourt would have cabled to Mr. Vansittart, but I told them to leave the appeal to me, for I am assured that the decision will rest with you. I cannot think that you will deny me. With Mr. Vansittart directing affairs, my people will be hopeful. In his absence, they will march to death, brave but despairing.—Your afflicted HONORINE.

When the familiar name left her lips, Evelyn turned, and hid her face against her husband's shoulder.

Jerome put his arm round her:

"It has come sooner than we thought, old girl," was the best he could find to say.

Dick Harland dug his hands into his pockets, and looked at them fixedly, but Arizona Jim felt that he required sustenance, so he took a surreptitious bite at a plug of tobacco.

At last Evelyn regained her self-control. She said quite firmly:

"*Does* the decision rest with me, Jerry?"

"Yes."

"Then we start for France at the earliest moment."

"We?"

"Yes, we, I refuse to remain behind. If you go without me I will follow by the next steamer."

"My dear girl, there is the boy to think of."

"He will be well looked after during our absence. My place is with you."

"So be it, sweetheart. This war will make an old man of me, so we will age together. Dick, wire to New York and ask when the *Seafarer* can sail for Europe."

"And at the same time I will answer the Queen."

Evelyn was grit right through.

The day was a Tuesday, early in May. An hour later they learnt that the *Seafarer* would be ready for sea at two o'clock on Thursday afternoon.

"Then Thursday afternoon at two o'clock we sail," cried Jerome cheerily. "Now, Dick, I have been making a few plans already. How can I best purchase, for the speediest shipment, twenty thousand strong, well-conditioned horses? They must be up to weight and sound in wind and limb. Anything over fifteen hands and between five and eight years old will meet my requirements."

* * * * *

The difference in sun time between the Adirondack region in New York State and the capital city of the German Empire is about seven hours. At the precise hour, therefore, when the momentous question of Vansittart's return to France was decided it was already night in Berlin.

In a room of the Imperial Palace that stands on the famous boulevard, Unter den Linden, was gathered a notable conclave. The Emperor—impulsive, exuberant, brave to rashness and daring in thought—sat at the head of the council table. With him were the chief officers of the army and the responsible Ministers of State.

There was nothing of doubt or hesitation in the Kaiser's words, nor did his manner belie him. He had chosen this chamber for the conference, because here, if anywhere in that Royal abode, dwelt the spirit of his renowned grandfather. From that historical corner window the great founder of the modern German empire had looked to the last upon his faithful people and his beloved army.

The old warrior king believed in himself and in his mission. "A Hohenzollern," he said, "should not only be the first citizen of his land, but its first soldier and defender." In the closing days of his monogenarian life William I. would never discard his uniform. His only pleasure was to watch the daily march of the Guards down the broad avenue of the lime trees. A few hours before the end came he declared with dignity that "he had no time to be tired" when some faithful attendant suggested a rest from the routine duties of the day.

The restless activity of William I. was reborn in the ambitious and domineering grandson. But a faith in his

Here is the first instalment of the finest serial story yet written. It teems with incident and is told in a crisp, bright style, that at once absorbs the interest of the reader.

one half changed into a mania in the other. "Germany free and united" had transmuted itself into "Germany supreme and world-compelling."

This council of war lords had assembled to make the vain-glorious dream a sordid fact.

Someone had suggested a further sounding of the views held by the great Powers.

"Great Powers!" cried the Emperor. "Great Weaknesses, rather! Which of them will stir ship or soldier to aid France? No. The quarrel will be left to us, in the hope that the struggle will weaken both. Already Austria and Italy have taken care to declare their neutrality, and from Petersburg I hear that Russia is resolute in keeping aloof. England will not interfere. A hint that Egypt and the Transvaal shall be her portion of the spoil will render her complaisant—until I tell her that triumphant Germany has assumed the rights of conquered France on the Nile. But enough; we are resolved. When will the three army corps be mobilised, General von Waldersee?"

The officer addressed, the Chief of the Staff, instantly replied:

"We can commence to throw 150,000 men across the frontier on Thursday night at nine o'clock, your Majesty."

"Why at night? Is there no fear of uncertainty or confusion?"

"None, sire, for us; much for the enemy."

"Then I lead the first regiment of the centre column!"

"That must not be." It was Prince Hohenlohe, the Imperial Chancellor, who spoke so emphatically.

"How! Must not! These are hardly fitting words to me."

"Possibly, sire, but I cannot school my tongue to conceal my thoughts. Your Majesty's impetuosity and carelessness of danger are too well known to me that I should lend my voice to a proceeding which might risk your person in a frontier affray at the very inception of our enterprise."

Emboldened by the Chancellor's outspokenness, several officers concurred with him.

"Well, well," and the Emperor turned to a map with an air of annoyance. "You are right, I suppose. But mark me. Not always will I yield to these grandmotherly precautions. I had thought it would inspirit the troops to know that their leader led from the front and not from the rear."

"The project is worthy of your Majesty, but the gain is not to be measured against the possible loss."

"Who, then, will act as my personal representative? The Emperor's Deputy, at least, must be the first soldier to set foot on French soil."

"Surely no man's name can contend the right with me."

All eyes turned upon the new speaker, Colonel von Moltke, nephew of the renowned strategist, who manœuvred German armies with such faultless skill during the war of 1870.

"And none shall," cried the Kaiser enthusiastically. "Yours be the honour to lead the column, colonel, and Friday's sun shall see you major-general."

Prince Hohenlohe's cold accents broke in upon the buzz of comment evoked by the Emperor's stirring phrase.

"When will your Majesty declare war?"

"Ah! I had forgotten. Telegraph to our Ambassador in Paris that he is to demand his passports on Thursday evening."

"But he will not be able to cross the frontier before the outposts are met, and all trains are stopped."

"*Himmel!* he can come through Brussels."

So it will be seen that, whilst the King of France left affairs of vast importance to his Royal Consort, the Emperor of Germany also launched his thunderbolt by deputy.

The other Emperor, Vansittart, was the only one who actually travelled to the front at that fateful hour on Thursday.

CHAPTER II.

Flags—British and Otherwise.

The three German army corps entered France simultaneously at different points.

One line of march, from Metz by way of Gravelottes, Mars la Tour and Frames-en-Woevre, followed the historic route of the last war. Here the French had set up a formidable barrier of men and guns, backed by the splendid fortress at Verdun.

The second attack had also been foreseen. The concentration of Baravians at Thionville, or Diedenhofen, as it is rechristened by the Germans, caused the French Staff to expect and prepare for an immediate junction of the two corps in French territory. In the result they were not mistaken.

But the third was unpleasantly new. Vast quantities of troops were gathered at both Strasburg and Mulhausen. From each of these centres the natural advance across the frontier was, in one case, by Saarburg, north of the Vosges mountains, towards Lunéville and Nancy; in the other, through Alt Munsterol towards strongly fortified Belfort.

In either event the French would have opposed a bold front to the invaders. General Daubisson, who in his capacity as Governor of Paris was Commander-in-Chief under the supreme control of the King, was chagrined rather than alarmed when he found that the southern German column had secretly detrained at Markirch, and was able to push cavalry vedettes through the heart of the Vosges as far as Fraize, almost without striking a blow.

On the Friday morning the eyes of the world were bent on Paris and Berlin. The two cities comported themselves according to their moods, Paris yelping with excitement, the German capital throbbing with earnestness.

The King of France bore himself bravely before his people. In the comparative secrecy of the rebuilded Tuileries he showed alone the agonised apprehension that possessed him.

His one thought was that Vansittart would arrive too late.

"We were at least warned soon enough to have prevented this misfortune," he cried. "Why did we not bring him here a fortnight ago?"

"Your Majesty forgets," said Liancourt, "that Mr. Vansittart believed, as we did, that Germany would not commit this outrage upon humanity without even plausible excuse."

"Yes, yes," murmured Henri, "but the best of explanations will not disguise the fact. One short week of his counsel and presence would have achieved so much. One short week too soon, rather than too late!"

"Your Majesty cannot believe that the armies of France will be beaten from the field within a week?"

"Liancourt," and the King turned to his faithful minister with keen emotion in his face. "Let us not deceive each other. You know, better than I perhaps, what our enemies can accomplish, even in that brief period. It is for my brave soldiers, unready, ill-equipped, worse fed, that I grieve. You and I, my friend, can die at their head, but what will that avail France? France, my country—so happy, so prosperous, so little deserving this wretched fate!"

Liancourt could but urge the King to abandon useless regrets and do all within his power to repair defects. He realised, in their full bitterness, the truth of Henri's words.

In the palace near the Lindens, William the Second, who, for all his dash and waywardness, is a methodical German, had retired to rest and slept soundly after the telegrams arrived announcing the departure of the three columns. He rose early, fresh, and vigorous, ready to proceed to the front as soon as he learnt that the left bank of the Meuse was in possession of his troops.

General von Gossler waited upon him the moment he appeared.

"'Tis fitting," cried the Kaiser, "that on this, of all days, I should be greeted by the War Minister. What news, Von Gossler?"

"Excellent, sire. The fight is in the enemy's country. We have seized the desired positions, the armies are consolidating, and probably the first battle will be in progress by the time your Majesty reaches the frontier."

Yet the General's visage was not as cheerful as his intelligence, and the Emperor's quick eye noted the discrepancy.

"Is ought amiss then?"

"In one respect I have tidings that your Majesty will regret to ——"

"Quick! What has happened?"

"Colonel von Moltke was shot by the French picket as he drove them over the Woevre Bridge."

"Shot? Wounded you mean, I trust?"

"No, sire. Shot through the brain."

"The only place to hit a Moltke! Yet I would have given much that this had not occurred."

"Yes. I fear that the men will regard it as an evil omen."

"Omen! There is no such word in the drill book. And if there were, what better omen than that a Moltke should be the first to give his life for the Fatherland?"

"I hope the army will view it in that light, but ——"

"Pish! You grow superstitious, general. What say the papers about the war?" The Emperor, who was more deeply moved than he cared to admit, picked a copy of the Zeitung, and turned to the columns of foreign intelligence. The first paragraph that met his eyes caused him to utter an exclamation that had better be left in the maze of syllables that make up the German language.

Vansittart, when he first quitted the States to found an empire in France, had escaped the notice of the American press. Even he could not accomplish this feat twice.

Every New York paper turned the X-ray intelligence of a skilled reporter upon the *Seafarer* and her inmates when it became known that she was getting ready for a voyage.

Hence Reuter's correspondent was able to cable the following message:

New York, Thursday.—Shortly before it became known that Germany had declared war against France, Mr. and Mrs. Vansittart and suite sailed for Europe on board their yacht, the *Seafarer*. The famous millionaire's sympathies for France—indeed he remains a naturalised French citizen—coupled with the fact that the yacht's destination was kept a secret, render it practically certain that he is bound for Havre, or Cherbourg. He left his summer home in the Adirondacks most unexpectedly. Information concerning his intentions is absolutely refused at his New York estate office. In any case he cannot cross the Atlantic under eight days, as the *Seafarer* is a sixteen-knot boat.

General von Gossler wondered what had so disturbed his royal master, but he was not long left in doubt.

Turning upon him with a face of fury, Wilhelm roared:

"Why was I not told of this sooner?"

"Of w-w-what, sire?"

"Of the departure of this Yankee adventurer, blockhead! Send Vice-Admiral Hollmann here at once! Quick, if you would retain your portfolio!"

Utterly at a loss to know what this storm portended, the General rushed from the room, and the Kaiser strode to and fro in a towering rage.

He had not forgotten the way in which Vansittart, when President of the French, had played political poker with him. He wanted no more "raising" at his hands, and had cooled somewhat by the time the Secretary for the Navy raced back with the flurried von Gossler.

"Admiral," he shouted, "there are four well-defined routes across the Atlantic?"

"Yes, sire."

"Read this. Order a fast cruiser to proceed along each route and bring this man Vansittart, with or without his ship, to Hamburg. The commission of each captain depends upon the success of one of them. They must start forthwith and avoid conflicts with French vessels at any cost. Do you follow me?"

"I have no doubt I will fully comprehend your Majesty's commands when I have read the news which has caused your Majesty's agitation," answered the imperturbable sailor.

"Agitation! I am not agitated. Only emphatic." Nevertheless the Emperor regretted that he had betrayed such deep feeling before his subordinates. He condescended to explain himself more coherently.

It was thus that Jerome's departure was heralded in the hostile camps.

Twelve hours after the *Seafarer* passed the Sandy Hook lightship and turned her smart figure-head eastward, four fast and well-armed German cruisers sailed from Hamburg and Bremerhaven intent upon her capture or destruction. The Stars and Stripes fluttered in the breeze over the taffrail as the gallant little ship plunged steadily onwards through the long Atlantic rollers.

Reuter's correspondent was not mistaken in describing her as a sixteen-knot ship. Her small size (2,000 tons) and her owner's desire to be able to voyage in her anywhere precluded a higher engine-power. To drive her at twenty knots through a heavy sea would be not only dangerous, but destructive of all comfort to those on board, this speed being with difficulty maintained by an ocean-going Colossus five or six times her tonnage.

The party accommodated themselves with varying emotions to the vagaries of the continent of seas which constitute the North Atlantic.

On the third day out, although on a southerly course, they plunged into the heel of a fog that had swept down from the Newfoundland Banks. But to Evelyn the chilly mist was refreshing, and she walked the deck leaning on her husband's arm with a sense of exhilaration at the vastness of their enterprise.

Her first feeling of resentment had passed. They were now committed, for good or evil, to the fortunes of France, and her keen sense of justice rebelled against the wanton cruelty of the Germans in seeking to cripple their great neighbour in the hour of progress and prosperity.

She noted, too, with quiet pride that Jerome had regained his old-time bearing of command and self-reliance.

Even emperors stagnate in disuse. Vansittart had, to her eyes, grown taller since he quitted lake-fishing for the great game of "Empire."

During his brief halt in New York he had done much. Not every man can contrive to expend twenty-five millions sterling in half that number of hours, but he had done this, to the huge benefit of France, as will be seen hereafter.

Now he spent most of his time in reading the records of the war of '70-71, together with much poring over maps and jotting down of memoranda.

This evening Evelyn protested against so much preoccupation, and carried him off for a constitutional before dinner.

During their walk they noticed Arizona Jim leaning against a ventilator away forward, gazing fixedly into the wall of fog. Jim was wrapped in a brown study, and looked so serious that they both laughed.

"What are you thinking about so deeply, Jim?" inquired the millionaire.

Bates started.

"I was thinkin', boss, that things air tolerable thick ahead."

"Here, do you mean?"

"Nit s'long as we keep tootin' the foghorn I guess we're all right here, if the other feller does the same."

"In France, then?"

"Yes, guv'nor, that's the locality. You won't find no Injun signs on rocks to help fix this business."

"Why, Jim, you are the one man in the world I should not suspect of doubting the future. Have you lost faith in me?"

"No, guv'nor. Not I. Nary a bit. What you sez goes. But you'll have to kill off a blamed lot of Germans."

Evelyn clutched Jerome's arm more tightly. Bates had an unpleasant knack of revealing the truth without any circumlocution. For the first time she realised that the conquest of men meant carnage—that her husband might be called upon to direct red and horrible war.

Next morning, whilst Evelyn was pouring out a third cup of coffee for Jerome and Dick, the captain of the *Seafarer* hurriedly entered the saloon.

"There's a British man-of-war about three miles ahead on the port bow, sir, and she has signalled us to stop," he said.

"To stop? An English ship? Are you quite sure she is English?" cried Jerome.

"Quite certain, sir. She is the fast cruiser *Hawke*. I know her well by sight. What shall we do?"

"Obey the signal by all means. What's up now, I wonder?"

They went on deck and scrutinised the handsome warship, for the over-night fog had wholly disappeared, and the fine vessel supplied a human interest to the vast panorama of blue rolling sea and sunlit sky.

The *Hawke*, first-class cruiser, 7,350 tons, of 12,000 horse-power, and carrying twelve guns, was evidently in earnest. She slightly altered her course in order to come nearer, and when half-a-mile ahead slowed down to lower a boat. An officer took his seat in the stern sheets, and the steady pull of eight strong-armed blue-jackets soon brought him alongside the *Seafarer*.

Within hailing distance he cried:

"Is Mr. Vansittart aboard?"

"Yes," replied Jerome. "I am he."

"I am very glad I have fallen in with you. I wish to speak with you privately."

Suiting the action to the words, he quickly climbed the rope-ladder which had been lowered, and gained the deck of the *Seafarer*.

With smiling courtesy he introduced himself: "I am Captain des Voeux Hamilton, of H.M.S. *Hawke*, which you see there. I have information of great importance for you. Shall we go to the saloon?"

Jerome led the way, saying:

"My wife and brother-in-law may accompany us?"

"Assuredly, Mr. Vansittart."

Once out of earshot of others the officer explained his strange appearance in mid-Atlantic. He began with a question.

"Do you know that war has broken out between Germany and France?"

Evelyn uttered an involuntary exclamation. Even Van-

When you have read this instalment of "The Lost Provinces," take this copy of *P. W.* round to your best friend, and advise him to read it likewise.

sittart was staggered by the suddenness of the announcement.

"Surely matters have not reached that stage already?" he exclaimed.

"There can be no doubt about it. The German armies commenced an invasion of France on Thursday night. I left Portsmouth at noon on Friday, and several slight affairs had already taken place on the frontier, whilst in military circles it was generally believed that the first pitched battle would take place yesterday, Sunday, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Mars la Tour."

Jerome was powerfully moved, but his anger at this catastrophe only manifested itself by a tightening of the lips as he said:

"This is indeed grave news for me, Captain Hamilton."

"I fear my next item will be even more unpleasant, in so far as it affects you personally. Our Foreign Office is naturally keeping a very close watch on all naval movements at this moment. A trustworthy Hamburg correspondent warned Whitehall by secret telegraphic code, that four German cruisers put out to sea, in a great hurry, early on Friday. He learnt by some means that their object was to catch you and prevent you, at all hazards, from landing in France. Your yacht is an American ship, but defenceless, and you are reported to be a French citizen. Nice diplomatic differences can, however, be adjusted months hence, and even large personal indemnities paid. Meanwhile, you would be accommodated with a residence in some remote German castle. I think you follow me. You have friends in Whitehall, Mr. Vansittart, so here I am."

"Captain Hamilton," said the millionaire warmly, "I am immensely indebted to the British Government and to you personally. But tell me. At sea I am helpless. The *Seafarer* is not a fast boat. I may presumably expect capture at any moment?"

"Hardly. The *Hawke* can slip away from anything the Germans have got, and we had, say, a couple of hours' start from Portsmouth. But one of the quartette will certainly fall in with you this afternoon or evening."

"Are they entitled to board my yacht and seize her?"

"They are not. But I know what I or you would do under similar circumstances—leave others to settle the rights of the case, eh, Mr. Vansittart?"

The Anglo-Saxon is very much alike on both sides of the Atlantic. They all, even Evelyn, grinned in concert.

"What are your orders, Captain?" said Jerome after a pause.

"My orders are to find you, and assist you."

"Without qualifications?"

"Absolutely!"

"In the absence of an American man-of-war I am justified in asking your protection under circumstances that savour of piracy."

"Well, you see it is this way. I can stand by you, and help you if appealed to, but—again regarding events from the German point of view—a single shell would probably settle your business during the argument."

Dick Harland now broke in.

"It strikes me that the *Seafarer* is hardly a safe place within the meaning of the act."

"What act?" said Evelyn innocently.

The question raised a laugh. Their absurd position was comically serious. Then a light broke upon Vansittart.

"Would it inconvenience you too much, Captain Hamilton, if I were to ask you to find quarters for a small household of five on board your ship during the next few days?"

"When I get the request in writing," said the sailor, with dry humour, "you will come with me to quarters already prepared."

Then, with a smile, he turned to Evelyn. "You will not find a cruiser quite so comfortable as this magnificent vessel, Mrs. Vansittart, but my officers and myself will be delighted to entertain you."

"I cannot express my gratitude," began Jerome.

"No need, sir. But time presses."

A bustle of stewards, some agonised moments for a French maid, a few instructions to the captain of the *Seafarer*, and the whole party were seated in the *Hawke's* gig, which bounded willingly towards the warship.

All that morning and afternoon there was much jubilant activity on board the *Hawke*.

"Strike me stiff," said a sturdy A.B. who was hoisting ammunition from the forward magazine. "I didn't play for a shindy this trip, but you never knows yer luck."

"If things goes right to-day we'll have a fair old beano, Bill," growled his mate, hoarse with the effect of nearly swallowing a quid when he caught the gunnery lieutenant's eye fixed on a suspicious lump in the side of his cheek.

Arizona Jim sighed as he listened. A six-chambered revolver was a trivial thing beside a 6in. quick-firing gun. For the only time in his life he envied his fellow-men.

At three bells in the first dog watch, or, in shore phrase, 5.30 p.m., the *Seafarer*, having ignored previous signals, was compelled to shut off steam in obedience to a gun fired across her bows by the German belted cruiser, *Das Rheinland*, 6,500 tons, ten guns, commanded temporarily by Vice-Admiral von Grudenau.

The order was imperative, and the matter at issue important, as the distinguished officer himself, escorted by an armed boat's crew, pulled off towards the *Seafarer*, and the watchers from the *Hawke* could easily distinguish an animated colloquy in progress on her deck between von Grudenau and the Yankee skipper.

It soon ended. The German did not return to his own vessel, but rapidly approached the *Hawke*.

He was received with ceremonious courtesy.

After compliments, as they say in the east, he explained:

"My Imperial master, the German Emperor, being at war with France, demands the person of a French subject, one Monsieur Jerome K. Vansittart, who, I am informed, is on board this ship, which flies the flag of Great Britain, a neutral nation." He spoke as a man incensed at being set back in the moment of success.

"I beg to refer your Imperial master, the German Emperor, to my Royal mistress, the Queen of England," was Captain Hamilton's suave reply.

"This, sir, is a subterfuge, and you know it," cried the vice-admiral, pale with suppressed anger. "I emphatically demand the delivery to my custody of this gentleman whom I see standing here."

"And I as emphatically refuse to comply with your demand."

"On what grounds, sir?"

"Firstly, because Mr. Vansittart, his wife, and brother-in-law, are the honoured guests of H.M.S. *Hawke*, and consequently of the British Government. Secondly, because you fail to adduce proof that Mr. Vansittart is a French citizen. Thirdly, if he were, and on board this ship, it would, under the circumstances, require the whole German navy to take him off it."

"Bully for you, cocky," murmured Jim Bates, who stood close behind the British officer. Captain Hamilton, electrified at such a remark on his own quarter deck, turned half angrily to the speaker, but a glance at Jim softened his expression.

The German was ready to burst with rage. Full well he knew that he had been tricked by a specious artifice arising from wholly unexpected conditions. Yet he dared not, and would not, return to Bremerhaven without attempting to serve his country in this ticklish affair. Why not strive, at the sacrifice of his life, to rid Germany of one potent enemy.

He involuntarily made a half step forward, whilst his right arm crossed to his sword, but Captain Hamilton and another officer sprang in front of him, and Arizona Jim's hand fell to his hip. There are times when a six-shooter is more convenient than even a six-inch gun.

The incident passed so quickly that it might have been imaginary were it not accentuated by Evelyn's slight cry of alarm.

Von Grudenau, with a rigid bow, said: "Further conversation is useless. I must obey my orders. With your permission, sir, I will return to my vessel."

As he spoke his eyes wandered along the lines of the *Hawke*. He could not fail to see that she was in fighting trim.

Captain Hamilton followed his glance and smiled.

"Will you not do me the honour of prolonging your visit and inspecting the ship? She will bear scrutiny, I can assure you."

The other politely waived the offer aside.

"I have no option but to try what force can do," he said.

"Any course you may see fit to adopt will afford me equal pleasure. But this is not a personal matter, sir. I am in duty bound to tell you that your ship is over-matched. You are rashly risking a useful vessel and the lives of your crew in striving to carry out your unreasonable instructions."

Again von Grudenau bowed, and without further speech quitted the *Hawke*. Not until he was well clear of her did he notice that the British man-of-war was now interposed between the *Seafarer* and *Das Rheinland*.

Captain Hamilton at once turned to Jerome. "Mr. Vansittart, all non-combatants must be taken to safer quarters."

The millionaire had expected some such request. "Well," he said, "if I turn my back on the Germans this time it is only that I may have a better look at them afterwards."

The *Seafarer* now made off as fast as her screw could revolve. By the time Von Grudenau reached his own ship she was out of practical range, and the *Hawke* was slowly moving ahead. The frame of the fine cruiser seemed to throb with suppressed excitement. There was enough electricity in the bodies of officers and men to polarise her compasses.

The British commander was not mistaken as to the enemy's intent. There was no nonsense about firing preliminary shells as range-finders. Trusting to possible forgetfulness, the first German projectile fairly struck the companion-way near which Vansittart had stood. Iron splinters and shattered woodwork kicked up a rare com motion in the locality, but Hamilton's nice calculation of Von Grudenau's objective was equally successful in averting loss of life or limb among his officers and men.

Thereafter—for two minutes that seemed like hours—the listeners in an oil-lit cabin, near the engine-room, heard a series of violent explosions, erratic snorts of steam, a din of electric bells, and an indescribable rattle of machinery, whilst five times in rapid succession came a clang of battered iron accompanied by a staggering thud.

Then there was silence, vague, terrifying, maddening quietude, when the strained ear listened for the least sound with the agonised intensity of one who mysteriously wakes in the dead of night and strives to penetrate impenetrable gloom by the unaided sense of hearing.

Evelyn clung desperately to her husband. The French maid, huddled up in a corner, sobbed hysterically; and the three men each confessed afterwards that they expected the top of the cylinder to blow off.

Suddenly the door opened, and Lieutenant Blomfield entered.

"Captain Hamilton wishes you to come on deck," he said. "If Mrs. Vansittart will allow me to hold her arm I will take care of her."

From the calmness of his tone he might have been conducting them to witness a regatta, but Evelyn's arm bore the marks of his grip for days. The people on the *Hawke* had just passed through an extremely sensational and diverting performance. In such moments it is hard to differentiate between the sleeve of a gown and an iron stanchion.

Events soon became intelligible.

The third shell from the *Hawke* had smashed *Das Rheinland's* rudder, and when Captain Hamilton had discovered his opponent's helplessness he ordered the "cease fire."

The *Hawke's* casualities amounted to three men killed and ten wounded, together with some broken plates and wrecked top hamper.

Von Grudenau lost everything, as he was captured in La Manche by a small French squadron, sent out for the purpose of interviewing him and his three consorts.

CHAPTER III.

A Council of War.

"What shall I tell the people, sir?" said the representative of the Figaro when he met Vansittart on board the *Seafarer* as she swung to her berth in the inner harbour at Havre.

"Tell them," said Jerome, "that France and I conquered the Sahara; surely, then, we are equal to the lesser task set us by Germany."

"May I be informed as to your personal intentions?"

"Only this, that I go direct to Paris to consult with the King. But, monsieur, a word in your ear. Make much of the help given me by the British warship. Quote it as an earnest of English goodwill to France. This war will not be an affair of moments, and when the stress comes it will be well to have England at our back. Do you understand?"

"Fully, monsieur. Your wishes are law to every patriotic Frenchman."

"And now," said Vansittart, "let us change *rôles*. What news have you?"

The journalist glanced round nervously to make sure he was not overheard. "I, monsieur! France is unprepared. The newspapers claim victories won for our arms, but each such victory heralds a German advance. I fear the worst, and have abandoned hope. Who can extricate us from this iscrable position?"

The journalist forgot his mission in his patriotism. But the millionaire had long ago measured the French character, and knew how to mould it to his will. "I have come from America to make a strong effort, monsieur. Confidence begets success. Tell France to be confident."

The Figaro used the phrase as a headline next day.

Vansittart could, had he chosen, have driven to Paris over the prostrate bodies of his admirers. There was no need to ask the public to trust him. He was their idol. No intelligence, not even the unexpected declaration of war, had created such a thrill of excitement throughout the country as the announcement of Jerome's landing. And when the labouring wires bore to every centre of population the full details of his sensational escape in mid-Atlantic, coupled with his first cheerful words of encouragement, excitement passed from fever-heat to delirium.

The magnetism of the hour spread to the army. Next day the northern German column sustained a severe check in the vicinity of Verdun. When an apparently impregnable flank was turned by a French brigade, each member of which fought with a vigour and determination that upset the scientific calculations of their opponents, the rallying cry of the fighting line was: "We are sent by the Emperor!"

The routed Bavarians were sent by the Emperor, too; but they had not the same measure of belief in their commander.

Paris wept with joy.

When Vansittart reached the Gare St. Lazare, he found soldiers and populace in imminent danger of conflict. The authorities had detailed thousands of men to line the streets, and three regiments of cavalry to assist the infantry.

But the people would not be repressed. They wanted to see, to cheer, to touch their idol, and for a little while their frenzy threatened to end in bloodshed.

Vansittart grasped something of the ferment from the anxiety displayed by the commander of his escort.

He settled the question by mounting an officer's charger, and himself leading the cavalcade at a walking pace through the streets.

Everybody saw him, everybody cheered him, and all were supremely delighted.

This was one side of the question; the other presented itself when, an hour after he reached the Tuileries, he joined the King and his principal officers of State in the council chamber.

Here gloom took the place of jubilation. With downcast and saddened faces the chief men in France made him cognisant of the bitter truth.

They seemed to invite reproach by their words. A neglected army, a depleted navy, deficiency in guns and stores, skeleton divisions and inferior commissariat—these were the rusted weapons they opposed to the burnished panoply of Germany.

A plethoric treasury was their worst indictment. Money was being lavished now, but was it not too late?

Only once did Vansittart betray resentment. When he heard of the meagreness in munitions and supplies he said, doubtingly and surprised:

"Can this be possible with Pompier at the head of the department?"

Silence followed his question. The members of the Council looked at each other, until the King passionately explained:

"I protested against it, Vansittart, but Court influences were too strong for me. Admiral Pompier was placed on the retired list, the department was split up into naval and military branches, and they are controlled by the Comte de la Feray-Metier and Baron de Champmai respectively."

"Are these gentlemen at present discharging the same responsible duties?" said Vansittart with asperity in his tone.

"Yes."

"It is not their fault, probably. Liancourt, will you see to it that Pompier is recalled, by telegram, and given complete control. If he thinks these titled nonentities can help him, let them be retained. If not, they can be provided for elsewhere."

Liancourt smiled. This man, inscrutable to others, was an open book to Vansittart. It was easy to see that he rejoiced at the end of palace intrigues.

Tell your friends about "The Lost Provinces." Tell them it is the finest serial ever written, and you will be telling the truth.

One member of the council was not pleased at this first indication of the millionaire's methods.

The fat, pompous, fussy Duc de Tangier, who became Secretary of the Navy because he owned a successful yacht, rose and protested angrily.

"Your Majesty, it is a matter of precedent that in such a serious resolve as that involved by the purposed change the opinion of the responsible authorities should be sought. I, as head of the naval service, protest against Mr. Vansittart's method of dealing with this council, headed as it is by your Majesty in person."

"Who are you?" said Jerome coolly. He felt assured that he must speedily assert himself, else he would be thwarted constantly by every jack-in-office who had sprung into existence beneath this mushroom monarchy.

"The Duc de Tangier, sir."

"Was it upon your recommendation that Admiral Pompier was removed from the office to which I appointed him?"

"Yes, it was. Let me add, sir, that your words——"

"Are generally obeyed. Monsieur le Duc, I give you the alternative of sitting down with a closed mouth, or being dismissed from your post."

The Duc sat down.

Vansittart continued: "Lest there be any doubt concerning my attitude I now tell you plainly that in the present desperate state of France there must be one commander-in-chief. If I am to fill that important place I will listen to your counsel, but my orders cannot be questioned. Insubordination here means dismissal; in the field, death. Are these your terms, or do I return to the United States?"

The King, who had cultivated some degree of tact since he ascended the throne, cried:

"If you leave us, Vansittart, you must take the Queen and me with you. We shall not be wanted in France. Come, Tangier, cry 'Peccavi.' If I am the King, do not forget that Mr. Vansittart is 'the Emperor.'"

The crestfallen Duc apologised, handsomely enough. Thenceforth he was the millionaire's keenest supporter.

"And now, Liancourt," said Jerome, "what is the position?"

Liancourt unfolded a map. "Ten days ago," he said, "the German Emperor simultaneously threw three army corps across the frontier. Three severe battles have been fought, besides several minor engagements. Although not routed, the French troops have been beaten, by superior numbers, by superb concentration, and, particularly, by overwhelming artillery fire.

"The northern German column, commanded by General Kreuznach, occupy the right bank of the Meuse, and have lodged a division across the river at Montfaucon. The centre attack, led by the Emperor in person, is also in possession of the Meuse, Verdun being threatened, and in momentary danger of investment.

"General Daubisson has, however, offered stout resistance on both lines of advance. He was admirably served by the railway companies, and has thus been able to check the enemy's progress much more than they anticipated. Their southern column has, unfortunately, been more successful. It has repelled, almost disastrously, two attacks from Nancy and Epinal, and we fear that the diversion of a large force from Belfort will mean the immediate launching of a fourth army corps collected at Mulhausen."

"Is that all?"

"No. The worst has yet to be stated. The only efficiently mobilised troops in France are already at the front. The German armies have halted to consolidate and bring up reserves. Here they are vastly superior to us. Supposing that their next forward move be effectual, I fail to see how we can hope to arrest their march on Paris."

"You summarise affairs rapidly," cried the King with some bitterness. He resented this terse version of his own convictions.

"Your majesty, we may deceive the enemy; but, as you have said, we cannot deceive ourselves."

"Where is the fleet?" inquired Jerome.

"Protecting the Gabes Canal, massed in squadrons at Marseilles, Toulon, Brest and Cherbourg, and patrolling the Channel," broke in the Duc de Tangier.

"And the German fleet?"

"So far as we know, resting securely behind the guns of Bremerhaven, Hainburg, and Kiel. They cannot hope to match our navy, neglected though it may have been."

Vansittart ignored the momentary sarcasm of the concluding remark.

"Let every available ship be sent from all the points you have named, monsieur, into the North Sea and the Baltic, with orders to do as much damage as possible to German commerce, ports, navy and fortifications. Cable instructions to commanders of vessels in distant parts of the world to sail for the nearest German Colony and find occupation there. This, I think, had better be put in operation at once."

The Duc rose, but he murmured: "Even a single German cruiser in the Mediterranean can do infinite damage to the Sahara works at Gabes."

"I have not forgotten that possibility," said Jerome quietly, and the Secretary for the Navy, in his new born zeal, rushed impetuously from the room to his Admiralty headquarters.

Vansittart took some writing materials and began to draft a memorandum, the others watching him curiously. Without ceasing to write he inquired:

"Is the Secretary for War present?"

"I am here," replied Geenral Villeneuve.

"Are you well supplied with horses?"

"On the contrary. I have had difficulty in collecting an additional 40,000 which have been requisitioned at the front."

"But you have them?"

"My lists are nearly complete. I intend to begin forwarding them in batches to-morrow."

"As for forage?"

"Fortunately, we are well found in that solitary respect."

"Good. I want you to collect 10,000 horses, strong and fast, and in good condition, together with a week's supplies for them, and 5,000 men, at Sedan, as soon as possible."

"At Sedan!" broke in several voices in utter astonishment. Sedan lays to the north of the present theatre of operations. In any case, it was a place of evil omen to the French mind.

Jerome paused a moment in his writing, pulled the map towards him, scrutinised it for a moment, and exclaimed:

"Yes, it is easily accessible by rail, and is just the right locality."

No one questioned him. General Villeneuve, not wishful to oppose the millionaire, yet ventured on a suggestion.

"We can hardly afford such a large number, monsieur. I pledged my word to General Daubisson that he should have 40,000 within a week."

"He will!" said Jerome, still writing. "I bought 20,000 before leaving the States. They will all reach Havre, Brest, or Cherbourg, between to-morrow, Sunday, and Tuesday."

A general buzz of subdued comment broke out at the table. The King looked at Vansittart's thoughtful face with something like wonderment in his own. Liancourt's air was ten years younger as he murmured to his nearest neighbour: "The Emperor has not changed, then." General Villeneuve resolved to carry out instructions without comment in future.

Jerome scribbled on industriously.

"Where is Colonel le Breton?" was his next question.

"He commands the cavalry division with the main army," said Villeneuve.

"Capital. The right man in the right place. I am sorry that he should have to relinquish his post for a time."

At last he ended his task, and carefully revised the manuscripts. The watchful council noted that he appeared to be very particular as to its phraseology. Several times he corrected it, and once sought the assistance of the King as to the exact significance of a French idiom he had used.

When quite satisfied with the production, he folded the document, and handed it to Villeneuve, saying:

"General, I entrust the execution of the task detailed therein to you, Daubisson, and le Breton. Have accurate copies made for the instruction of both those officers. Your part of the work will make itself clear on perusal, and no one else must be cognisant of its nature. May I be assured of your implicit adherence to my instructions?"

"What you have ordered will be done," cried the War Minister, in unconscious paraphrase of Arizona Jim's favourite declaration.

He at once quitted the assembly to attend to Vansittart's mysterious mandate.

"There," cried the millionaire with the contentment of one who has finished with a weighty undertaking. "I hope to hear the first news of that piece of work from England."

"From England!" said Henri, with undisguised amazement.

"Yes. Your Majesty must be aware of old that I thoroughly appreciate the press. The correspondents of the enterprising English journals will, I have no doubt, inform us as to the success or failure of my first personal blow at the German host."

He explained to the Council the nature of his intended coup, and this will be made clear to the reader in the succeeding chapter.

"I may say in conclusion," he added, "that I was not idle before I sailed from New York. My agents are buying arms, ammunition, horses and equipment, together with some special requirements of my own, at every possible centre in England and America. They are all consigned to a mythical individual named Hiram P. Sloker, of Boston, Massachusetts, but I have no doubt that they will eventually, and very soon, I hope, find their way to various French ports. The authorities must be instructed to look out for them, and the less said about these consignments the better. As I have already remarked, the press can render us great service, but it can do us even greater injury by making our secrets known to the enemy."

"You have brought us new life, my friend," said the King, seizing Vansittart's hand impulsively.

"You have plenty of life," was the cheerful answer, "but you needed rousing a bit. The catastrophe stunned you more by its suddenness than its magnitude. Believe me, France will arise from this supreme trial more powerful, more dignified than before."

"She will be bankrupt in gratitude," cried Liancourt.

"Nay, that is impossible. Of all countries, she pays most dearly for slight services. Now to protect the Sahara."

He wrote a telegram addressed to the British Foreign Secretary: "The exigencies of the campaign compel France to leave the Sahara canals at Gabes unprotected. Your interests, however, demand that they shall not be injured by any hostile power. Full explanations will be given to the British Ambassador in Paris."

"Germany will think many times before she acts once so as to impel Great Britain to actively side with us in this struggle," he explained to those present, and the message was dispatched.

When the council dispersed, Jerome sought his private apartments. He missed Evelyn, and in response to his inquiries was told that the Queen, worn out with nursing her ailing child during the harass of recent events, was taking a much-needed rest, whilst his wife was looking after the infant prince; otherwise Honorine would not have left the boy with his attendants.

Jerome smiled when he reflected that even in this troublous time the two mothers would find more to say concerning the youngsters than about affairs of State. As he commenced a letter to Pompier, Arizona Jim entered.

Vansittart laid down his pen for a moment and Bates took the cue.

"There's bin a big talkee, guv'nor?"

"Yes, Jim, there has."

"D'you rec'llect, boss, when we started West last trip, as I said that the French could cook, bully, and fight well, but were no good at thinkin', so they'd be sure to want you agin?"

"I remember it quite well."

"An' they *did* want you, I guess?"

"Jim, when you grow too old for a fight you can set up as a prophet."

"Well, boss, afore I tackle that job I reckon on seein' you knock the stuffin' out of the Emperor William. Lordy, it'll be more fun nor a box of monkeys."

"He is the biggest opponent I have yet encountered, Jim. He is erratic, believes implicitly in himself, and governs a stiff-necked people. The combination is a difficult one. I shall need a long rest when the job is ended."

* * * * *

About the same hour in the afternoon the German Emperor learnt of Vansittart's arrival in France, from the same source that the latter looked to for information—the English newspapers.

William II. was too physically exhausted after a protracted reconnaissance at the front to fly into a rage at this reversal of the programme he had arranged.

He perused the telegram in silence, and reflected moodily for some moments before he turned to his Chief of the Staff.

"Von Waldersee, we must defeat Daubisson at the earliest opportunity."

"No doubt, sire, but it will not be judicious to cross the Meuse in force until we are reinforced."

"Nonsense! We must attack immediately. The French have received a much stronger reinforcement than we can hope for, and we risk a great deal by delay."

"How can that be, your Majesty?"

"That confounded American, Vamittart, has somehow eluded my cruisers, and is now in Paris. His mere presence is worth more than a couple of army corps to France. Attack! I tell you. Let us get to Paris and then, if he has the resources of the devil, he cannot cope with us."

De Tournon said the same thing when he sought to combat Jerome in his struggle for the throne.

(To be continued.)

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Never Read the Paper to Your Wife.

"Is there anything in the paper?" asked Mrs. Tiff of her husband, who had been monopolising the EVENING BUGLE.

"No," replied Mr. Tiff.

"It seems to me that you are taking a long time to read nothing. Suppose you hand it to me, perhaps I can find something in it."

"Well, here is something which may interest you. A man in Chester refused to pay his wife's funeral expenses, and the undertaker sued him for the money. The court decided that a husband must pay for his wife's burial. What do you think of taking a case like that to court?"

"I should think the mean man ought to be ashamed of himself," declared Mrs. Tiff emphatically.

"So should I," assented Mr. Tiff. "The very idea of a man not wanting to pay for his wife's funeral! I should have thought he would have been perfectly delighted to——"

"John Henry Tiff, what are you saying?" demanded the gentleman's wife.

"Oh, of course, I didn't mean that, you know. I mean that he should consider it a sacred duty to give his wife respectable burial, and pay for the same cheerfully——"

"Mr. Tiff, do you really mean that he—that you, for instance, would pay my funeral expenses cheerfully?"

"That isn't exactly what I mean, my dear. You must understand what I am trying to say."

"I understand perfectly what you are saying, Mr. Tiff. You tell me that you wish I were dead; that you would pay my funeral expenses cheerfully; that you would be perfectly delighted to have the opportunity—'perfectly delighted' were your very words, John Henry Tiff, and I think you are a wicked man."

"Oh, now, look here," protested Mr. Tiff, "you know very well that what I said wouldn't bear any such construction if you weren't so ready all the time to find occasion to scold me."

"You needn't try to defend yourself, for you can't do it. You said you'd think that a man ought to be delighted to have the chance to pay for his wife's funeral. It's enough to make any self-respecting woman go and commit suicide, so it is. And I'd go, too, much to your satisfaction. Oh! why, oh! why, did I ever think that I could love such a wretch as you?"

At this point Mrs. Tiff burst into tears, and Mr. Tiff put on his hat and walked out of the house.

A NEW FOOTBALL PUZZLE.

A CRISP £5 note will be given to the person who correctly, or most nearly correctly, solves the following puzzle. In the event of a tie, the prize will be divided. Don't copy out the verses, simply send in a list of the names in the proper order with the numbers against each. Fill up the blanks in the following lines of verse, with the names of football players, Association or Rugby, so as to preserve the rhyme and rhythm, and make the most appropriate common sense:

The cat is a (1) ——— on housetops o' nights
The dog is a (2) ——— and sometimes he bites,
The woodpecker (3) ——— at the (4) ——— in the tree,
And the peacock has (5) ——— his tail that can't see.

The sheep dot the (6) ——— side and browse as they go,
In the field soft-eyed (7) ——— contentedly low,
As they yield the warm (8) ——— grateful to man
For who would (9) ——— when get it he can.

The (10) ——— in the mud takes delight in a wallow,
First (11) ——— sent by the Spring, is the (12) ———,
The partridge in coveys, the (13) ——— may fear,
And the (14) ——— who stalks with his gun in the rear.

The (15) ——— in the (16) ——— lie couched in the ferns,
While the sentinel (17) ——— his head watchfully turns,
If the (18) ——— should approach, they would dash through the (19) ———,
And swift in a (20) ——— at full speed they would prick it.

The squirrels a (21) ——— of nuts that are brown,
The eider duck's eggs (22) ——— nest of soft down,
A (23) ——— of the (24) ——— is the Orang Outang,
And the yak's tail in (25) ——— doth flowingly hang.

The bear is a (26) ——— of caves in the hill,
The monkey's a (27) ——— who never keeps still
The sloth as a (28) ——— is only a laggard,
And the parrot will (29) ——— away oft like a blackguard.

Now come, gentles all, though your mind it perplexes,
Boy or girl—man or woman—all colours—both sexes.
Whether (30) ——— or (31) ——— man just try it for fun,
If you solve me the (32) ——— I'll cry out (33) ———.

All attempts to reach this office in envelopes marked "NAMES," by Monday, January 3rd.

Miss White—Queen of Sweden.

IF all the claimants to European thrones could be mustered under one banner they would form a very respectable "Foreign Legion"—respectable (if we may venture to put it so) in quantity as well as quality.

The thrones of Europe can scarcely be regarded as "safe seats"; the various changes that have taken place at different periods have naturally resulted in an abundance of lineal descendants to this or that reigning family of olden times, and if it were possible to let them all have a limited term of office—like the President of a Republic—it would require a few generations to work off all claims.

The latest claimant is a lady, a native of the United States, which tends to demonstrate that the remotest chance of obtaining a throne—those things that are known only in the effete "Old World"—is sufficient to upset the enlightened notions on hereditary rule entertained by our American cousins.

Many claimants are considered to be mad; Miss Louise White, of Indian territory (the name does not fit in with the locality) begs to inform everybody whom it may concern—and everyone else, for the matter of that—that she is perfectly sane and responsible for her actions.

The lady claims to be a lineal descendant of Sweden's most popular king, Gustavus Adolphus, whose direct descendant, Gustavus IV., was deposed in 1809 because he embroiled the country in too many foreign wars.

Miss White, backed by an array of legal talent and much documentary evidence, has gone to Stockholm and taken a room in a hotel whence she can see the palace from which she hopes to oust King Oscar. And she has expressed her determination to stay there till her claim is established.

King Oscar, of Sweden, is a member of the Bernadotte family, which, three or four generations ago, was not even a noble family. If Miss White can prove her descent, she has, to that extent, a better right than he to the throne; but he has the advantage of being the man in possession, and is not at all likely to let go. And although King Oscar has occasionally had a little disagreement with some of his subjects, he is fairly popular, whereas Miss White is unknown, and has to suffer for the sins of her deposed ancestor.

"I DON'T see that there is any advantage in those clay pipes which you always seem to prefer."

"Oh, but there is. When they drop on the floor, for instance, you haven't to stoop to pick them up."

Weak Digestion; Low Vitality.

When the vitality of the body is reduced there is almost always impaired digestion. We notice disturbances of digestion quickly, and it has become almost fashionable to abuse digestion in the name of "treatment" by all sorts of unnatural processes.

If we go a little deeper into the subject we find that digestion is weak because vitality is at a low ebb. The body is not assimilating its nourishment.

When baby's digestion is all upset you don't give it powerful drugs. You give it Scott's Emulsion, and notice an improvement in two days. The consumptive who takes Scott's Emulsion for strength finds that with strength comes digestive power as well.

Therefore, when your system needs more resistive force than it is getting from ordinary food, don't take all the tonics and stimulants you can think of, or read about. They never bring more than temporary relief, and they so often bring everlasting harm.

It is nourishment in an easy form that the human race needs most when vitality is low. Physicians know this, and they fight harder than anybody else for Nature's remedies. Ask any physician for his opinion of Scott's Emulsion, and he will praise it. Is his endorsement not enough?

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The doctor: "Don't get up just now; but if you *do*, don't go out without a box of Poncelet's Pastilles. They are not only the *only* cure, but they protect the throat, and thus prevent any fresh cold."

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AND TAKE

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Poncelet's Pastilles are most agreeable to the taste; they prevent and cure Coughs, Colds, Bronchitis, Hoarseness, Throat Irritation, &c., when all other remedies have failed; their action is immediate.

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HOME NOTES.

A PAGE MORE PARTICULARLY FOR LADIES.

ISOBEL will be glad to answer, in this page, questions of general interest upon household matters, so far as space permits. Envelopes should be marked HOME NOTES.

Flour baked in a tin dish until it is well browned, is a very good colouring to keep ready for use.

Rub the Hands on celery after using onions, and the smell will instantly disappear. The outer leaves may be saved for this purpose.

Shrimp Sauce. Pour a little water over the shrimps and wash them. Place them in melted butter which is smooth and nicely made, give them a boil, and add lemon juice to flavour. (*Reply to* MARIE.)

Warts Can Easily be Removed in this simple manner: Dissolve as much washing-soda as the water will take up, and wash the warts daily until they disappear. (*Reply to* BLUEBELL.)

Children Should be Taught to Eat Freely of all Green Vegetables, not especially for the nutriment they contain, but because of the mineral matter they convey to the system, and their good effect in checking constipation.

Defaced Varnish such as you describe, which shows white marks, should have this polish applied: Take linseed oil and turpentine in equal parts, shake them well in a phial, and apply a small quantity on a soft piece of cotton until the original colour is restored. Wipe the mixture off entirely, and polish with soft rags. (*Reply to* MIMA.)

Make Chocolate Caramel Thus: Grate half a pound of chocolate, and heat it slightly in the oven; add a quarter of a pound of butter, two ounces of sugar, and half a pint of cream. Mix all these ingredients together, and add a few drops of essence of vanilla. Boil the caramel slowly till it cracks if dropped into cold water. Then pour on to well-oiled tins to the thickness required. When nearly cold form the mixture into squares with an oiled knife.

Bloater Paste. Cut off the heads and tails from six fresh-cured Yarmouth bloaters, immerse them in scalding water to remove the skins, take out the backbones and put them in a stewpan with six ounces of clarified butter, a bit of mace, a teaspoonful of anchovy, and a pinch of cayenne. Simmer all gently together over a slow fire for ten minutes; pound in a mortar, rub through a coarse hair sieve, and use this preparation to fill small pots, which must be covered with butter or lard, and kept in a cool place for use. (*Reply to* B. P.)

Do not Coddle your Children, for it is a great mistake, and one that is bound to result in great delicacy and discomfort. Boys are often made delicate by over-careful mothers. Girls are still more frequently protected from every blast that blows as though it would kill them instead of helping to make them strong and healthy. To mothers of young children I would say send your children out in all weathers but heavy rain, unless they are weak in the chest, then remember that an east wind will do your child no good. A great evil in training girls is that they are not taught to use their muscles. They should do so in moderation, and there will be little fear of "strained backs," or any other mischief.

Do you Skate, cycle, or go in for outdoor exercise at all? If so, you will find it well worth your while to invest in a pattern (No. (2000, price 3½d.), and make yourself knickers of serge, cloth, tweed, or a kindred material. For growing girls this style of underclothing is indispensable, for the knickers are far warmer than two or three petticoats several times their weight would be. Pattern No. 6126, shown in the margin, for a girl of fourteen to sixteen, is greatly in demand. Very little more than a couple of yards of material is required, and, having cut your fabric from the first-class pattern, to be had from these offices for 3½d., the young wearer might almost make it for herself. If combinations be worn, a lining is unnecessary, but otherwise duplicate knickers of twill calico should be so made that they button inside the tweed, and so are easily removed for washing purposes.

Jam Sauce. Mix half a pot of jam with a cupful of water, thicken it with cornflour, add a little wine, and serve.

In Roasting Meat turn with a spoon instead of a fork, as the latter pierces the meat and lets the juice out.

Never Commence Ironing on a sheet that was used to cover the board the previous week, or your clothes will be a bad colour.

Before Cooking a Leg of Mutton always cut off as much of the shank bone as you can spare, and add it to the stock-pot.

Paint Your Bunion with tincture of iodine every other day, and you will find the inflammation will be greatly reduced. (*Reply to* A. L. N.)

Anchovy Butter. Beat a tablespoonful of thick anchovy sauce into two ounces of butter, adding a few drops of lemon juice. Cool, and then mould into any shape desired. (*Reply to* BELFAST.)

A Furniture Polish which I think will suit you is made of two-thirds of turpentine and one of boiled linseed oil. Apply a small quantity with a flannel, afterwards polish with old dusters. (*Reply to* J. C.)

Invalid's Pudding. Cream together two ounces of butter, two ounces of caster sugar; here add a beaten egg, and by degrees a quarter of a pound of flour, with which a small teaspoonful of baking-powder is mixed. Flavour with a little spice or grated lemon peel, and steam in a plain mould for an hour. If necessary, add a very little milk to the above ingredients.

To Produce the Effect of a Bronchitis Kettle, keep a tea-kettle boiling over the fire or over a common night lamp. Have a tin tube fitted on to the spout of the kettle of such length and form as to throw the steam in front of the sick person, who will have the moist air brought within reach. The tube in some cases should be made several feet long. Great care must be taken to keep the kettle constantly filled up, as the water boils away very quickly.

When Scouring Tins, follow my process, and you will be pleased, I feel sure, with the result. Cake-tins and strainers that are greasy should be first washed in hot soda water, and then scoured clean with a soapy flannel dipped into silver sand. When the surface is perfectly clean, rinse in hot water, and dry with a clean cloth. Afterwards polish with a little dry whiting, and finish off with a leather. Dish-covers will never take a good polish unless washed with hot soda-water and soap first. For the corners and carved part use an old plate brush.

Economical Puff Paste is evidently what you want. Here is a recipe I have given before, and which is always very successful: Mix half a pound of flour with one teaspoonful of baking-powder and the same quantity of salt, stir together, and then mix into a stiff paste with water. Weigh out three ounces of lard or dripping and two ounces of butter. Roll the paste on a floured board, spread it with lard or butter three times. Lay the paste on one side for some time before using—twenty-four hours is not too much—then roll out. Bake in a sharp oven. (*Reply to* FULHAM, S.W.)

Risolti. It is the want of space that has kept me from answering your request sooner. Remember when serving this dish that the rice should be well done, and should be neither very dry nor very sloppy. First put two tablespoonfuls of butter in a pan, and in it fry a sliced onion till a good brown. Next add a breakfastcupful of washed rice, a pinch of salt, and a few threads of saffron dissolved in a tablespoonful of water. Shake the pan over the fire, and as the rice begins to swell, add, gradually, some good stock. Continue this till the rice is tender, turn it out on a hot dish and sprinkle with grated cheese. Season with cayenne pepper, and serve very hot.

This Orange Liqueur is, I suspect, what you are seeking. Cut the peel very thinly off half-a-dozen Seville oranges, and put it into a gallon jar with two quarts of best brandy. Next add one pound of lump sugar, and cork the jar. Pass the juice from the oranges through a thick straining bag and add to the peel. Shake the jar constantly, at least twice a day, for three or four weeks, then pass the liquor through muslin into a clean jar. Put three pounds of loaf sugar into a basin and pour over it half a pint of boiling water, and stand near the fire till the sugar is dissolved. When cold add to the spirit in the jar, cork tightly, and shake the bottle two or three times a day for five days, then bottle for storing. This liqueur should be kept at least seven or eight months, but the longer the better. The peel can be saved and dried for flavouring cakes, custards, etc.

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On account of the enormous size of our paper pattern business, we have introduced into our cutting department all the latest labour-saving appliances known to the scientific world, with the result that our patterns, which are the best in every way, are cut at a minimum cost. We are willing that our readers should share in this economy, so we offer the patterns at half price, viz.: Bodices, 3½d.; Skirts, 4½d.; Costumes, 6½d.; Coats and Skirts, 7½d.; etc., etc. The quality of the patterns is as good, or even better than ever.

Boots are Apt to be Covered with Mould if put away in a cupboard, where the damp can settle on them. This does not permanently damage the leather if it be wiped off, and after two or three days' blacking the polish will be as good as ever. (*Reply to* G. D.)

Remove Ink Stains from Collars with salts of lemon in the usual way, before having them washed. Should the ink stain have turned to a dirty stain after washing, the salts of lemon will remove it as effectually as if it were iron mould. (*Reply to* BRISTOL READER.)

Sausage Pudding makes a very tasty dish. First prick the sausages, and scald for five minutes. Set on a sieve to drain dry. Have one pound and a half of mashed potato. Grease a pie-dish, and put a layer of sausage meat in it, then some of the potato, more sausages, and lastly, a thick layer of potato. Pour a little dripping over the top, and brown in the oven. Some thick brown gravy may be served in a separate tureen.

Marrow Jam. Peel and slice a full-grown vegetable marrow or more, cut away the inside and soft parts, and to every pound of marrow add three-quarters of a pound of preserving sugar and the grated peel of one lemon. Let this all stand together for one night, then add the juice of one lemon, a teaspoonful of ground ginger, and boil all together till the marrow is quite tender and the syrup clear and stiff. Pour into jars and tie down in the usual way. (*Reply to* S. BARNES.)

To Cure Hams. This should be done in the winter months only. It will generally be found safe to begin pickling at the end of October. Let the ham hang for three days after the pig is cut up. Prepare the pickle by pounding and sifting one pound of salt, two ounces of saltpetre, one drachm of cochineal, one pound of very coarse sugar, and a very few cloves of shallot. Mix these ingredients well together, put them in a frying-pan over a clear fire, stirring the whole till it becomes hot, but not melted. Then rub the ham all over with it before a strong clear fire until it becomes a fine red. Then let it stand two days in a ham pan, when a quarter of a pint of cold spring water must be sprinkled over it. Let it remain two days more, after which bathe it frequently, and turn every day for a month, then drain it for twenty-four hours. Afterwards hang the ham in a chimney where wood is burnt, till well dried. The ham when once dried should be wrapped in clean strong paper, put into a bag, and hung up. During the summer always watch dried meats to see that they do not get attacked by flies. (*Reply to* ELSIE.)

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1897. OCT.	NOVEMBER.	DECEMBER.	1898. JAN.	FEBRUARY.	MARCH.	APRIL.	MAY.	JUNE.	JULY.	AUGUST.	SEPTEMBER.
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BETTER KEEP THE DOOR LOCKED.

THERE were half-a-dozen of us—two Englishmen and four Americans. It was in the month of July of last year—1896. We had been touring in Scotland for several weeks, doing a little shooting and fishing, and a deal of loafing. On the night I now have in mind, the weather being warm for that region, we lay about on the grass near the mountain inn spinning yarns, mostly of alleged personal adventure in various parts of the world. One of the Britons had just finished a thrilling tale of a tiger hunt in India, when a slender Yankee, the most sedate of the party, slowly removed his pipe from his mouth and said:

"My personal knowledge of tigers is wholly confined to what I have seen of them at menageries and circuses, but we have in America some unlicensed beasts sufficiently formidable to inspire a momentary interest in an ordinary person who happens to meet up with them unexpectedly. About ten years ago my wife and I, with our baby, lived for a time in Northern New York, on the edge of an extensive forest. It was a lonely spot, the nearest house a mile away, and I tried to manage my affairs so as to be at home every night. One evening, in summer, we had been sitting and talking until it had come to be, perhaps, ten o'clock, when we both heard a light tread in the room directly above. We were on the ground floor, and inasmuch as we supposed ourselves to be the only occupants of the premises, the sound overhead was interesting to say the least of it. Man or animal, the matter must be looked to, and there was nobody but me to do it. Seizing an old axe-handle, the only available weapon, I lighted my barn lantern and cautiously ascended the stairs. There in the room at the top, with its great yellow eyes shining like those of our friend's tiger in the jungle, was the biggest and ugliest-looking wild cat I had ever seen. As I was starting to retreat he made a leap for me, passing over my shoulder, tearing my shirt from my back, and with it a goodly strip of my skin and muscle. Then, seeing the outside door open, he plunged down the staircase and so out of the house; and you will easily believe I was not long in locking the door behind him."

"How did he get in?" asked the tiger hunter.

"*He got in through the door which I had carelessly left open* as I entered the house two hours earlier," said the American; "and since then I have been a perfect crank on locking the house doors. When the Society for the Discouragement of Wild Cats and Burglars is fully organised, I may reasonably expect to be President of it."

The writer was reminded of this little incident by the following statement. After reading it you will no doubt see why one suggested the other.

"When I was a boy," runs the letter, "my family thought I was in a decline. I was weak and languid, and had a gnawing, sinking feeling at the pit of the stomach. My mouth tasted badly, and I was constantly vomiting thick phlegm and a bitter fluid. I had a poor appetite, pains after eating and tightness at the chest and sides. *Also a dry, hacking cough, night sweats, and all the symptoms of consumption.* I was so weak and emaciated that the least thing exhausted me. At twenty, whilst living at Beeston, near Nottingham, I became so bad I thought I was going to die, and *chose the place where I was to be buried.* Then I took a turn for the better, and got about again. In 1870 I had a severe attack of jaundice, and after it I was fearfully weak. I had frequent attacks of giddiness, and used to fall down suddenly as in a fit. All my powers seemed to fail me. My voice left me, and I was so frail they had to prop me up with pillows. The doctor said I would die one of the attacks of giddiness. I took medicines and cod-liver oil, but they did me no good; and in this state I remained for years.

"In October, 1888, my son-in-law told me of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and I used it and soon found relief. My food digested, and I gained strength. After that I never looked behind me. I take an occasional dose when needed, and I am able to do light work. For private reasons I can only sign my initials. Mrs. Martin, chemist, 593, Ashton Old Road, Higher Openshaw, will vouch for my statement and answer enquiries.—H.W."

"I have known the writer of the above for seventeen years, and have often heard him speak of the benefit he derived from Mother Seigel's Syrup. I can vouch for the truth of his statement, and will answer enquiries. Owing to his official position he is not at liberty to allow the publication of his name. (Signed) Mrs. M. Martin (J. L. Martin), dispensing chemist, 593, Ashton Old Road, Higher Openshaw."

"The first step towards consumption," says Dr. Harvard Lindley, of St. Louis, U.S.A., in a late article on the subject, "are indigestion, dyspepsia malnutrition, and loss of weight." This was "H.W.'s" case, and he had close escape from death by that dread disease. In other words, dyspepsia *opens the door* to the consumption germs, as our American friend left *his* door open, inadvertently, to the wild beast from the forest. Learn the lesson keep the door closed. Mother Seigel's Syrup does it for you by preventing and curing dyspepsia.

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[A Swell Affair.]

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CONSULTATIONS FREE.

B. S. asks whether St. Helena is still used for the same purpose as it was in Napoleon's time?——Yes, it is still a state prison, but not in the strict sense of the word prison. It is a safe place of detention for more or less distinguished personages whom the British Government wants to keep out of mischief. For instance, among several other Zulu chiefs who are in detention there at present, is Dinizulu, son and heir of Cetewayo. He was sent there for complicity in an attempted rebellion, and he is kept there because it is feared that his presence and that of his brother chiefs would be likely to re-inflame the smouldering but by no means extinguished warlike spirit of the Zulus. They are, of course, treated with every consideration, and live most comfortable lives at the expense of the Government.

Inquirer.—I think there is no doubt that the pleasantness of many sorts of food is derived chiefly from the effect upon the delicate skin of the palate, and is therefore much more a question of touch than of taste. Ordinary jelly, or that sweet known to confectioners as Turkish Delight, might be given as an example. The Shah of Persia was, after all, quite right when he reproached some English visitors to his court, who used knives and forks, for not knowing that the sense of taste begins in the finger-tips.

The silver pencil-case in the "Spelling" competition has been awarded to Mr. Joseph Percival, 166, Oldham Road, Ashton-under-Lyne.

Here you have a house and a ladder in front of it. Commence at the bottom rung and ascend five rungs; this brings you to No. 7. You then ascend another seven rungs, bringing you to No. 19, or descend seven rungs, bringing you to No. 14, because you must retrace your steps when you arrive either at the top

or bottom rung until the number is completed, and so on. The idea is to arrive exactly on the top of the ladder by the shortest route, ascending or descending the number of steps marked at the side. A solid gold pencil-case will be awarded to the first person who sends the correct, or most nearly correct, answer, and a gold-plated pencil-case to each of the next fifty. Envelopes to be marked "Ladder," and to reach this office by Monday, January 3rd.

Neath, who may possibly be a musician himself, asks me what effect a band of musicians in full blast would have upon an untutored savage who had never heard music before.——I don't know. What I should like to know would be the effect that the savage, duly equipped with club and tomahawk, would have on the musicians when they had worried their way through a piece of Wagner. We get the musicians in Henrietta Street sometimes—and that's just when we begin to pine for the savage.

The first burglary claim of this season has been paid to Mr. C. Butler, 9, Camperdown House, Etherley Road, West Green, South Tottenham.

Veritier asks: "Is it possible to distinguish other people by their walk as you can jockeys and cavalry-men?"——It is not difficult to do this. The most interesting case is perhaps that of hospital nurses, who develop a curious manner of walking after they have been in the wards for any length of time. The chief sound in ordinary walking is caused by the heel which touches the ground first, and consequently hospital nurses, when attending the sick, get into the habit of treading on tiptoe. After a time this becomes with many of them a second nature, and even in the streets there is an unmistakable spring and jerk in their method of walking. They must not be confused, however, with the sheriff's officer, who somehow acquires the same trick.

The silver pencil-case in the "Problem" competition has been awarded to Miss J. J. Loyons, Moyvalley, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

Made for Two wants to know if there is any just cause or impediment why he and his best girl should not go to the theatre on bicycles or a tandem, and why theatre authorities don't provide proper accommodation for machines?——There is no law to prevent him doing so if he pleases, except the law of common-sense. In Australia, however, where **Made for Two** might emigrate when made one, the theatres have regular cycle nights, and then everybody goes on cycles, which are looked after by the staff during the performance, after which they ride away in couples in the moonlight. That's all very well, of course, in Melbourne, where the streets are half as wide again, and the traffic not a tenth as large as in London; but over here, I fancy, the visit to a theatre would pretty often end in a visit to the hospital.

While on this subject I may answer a question which **Pedestrian** asks: "Am I obliged to get out of the way of a cyclist when he rings his bell?"——I don't solve legal conundrums on this page, but this is not one, and it is a matter of wide public interest. According to the law the pedestrian has the first right to the street—pavement, roadway and all. It is the cyclist's business to get out of the way or get off. The pedestrian is not called upon to budge an inch, and if there's an accident it's the cyclist's fault. This, of course, does not apply to wilful obstruction.

Mr. H. Rose Mackenzie, of the **Cape Mercury**, writes:

> It may interest you to know that early in the morning of Wednesday, November 3rd, when on my way to Bulawayo to attend the railway festivities there, I observed at Palachwe station, 1,132 miles from Capetown, and in the very heart of King Khama's country, a native Bamangwato, innocent of any clothing except a loincloth, selling *Pearson's Weekly* at the rate of three for a shilling.

Northallerton asks why, in the case of a criminal being convicted of two offences, he should receive two sentences to "run concurrently." Why should not one do?——The reason is this. According to English law and justice, an offender can neither be tried twice nor punished twice for the same offence. Therefore, if only one sentence were passed, he might be open to prosecution and imprisonment over again for the offence for which he was not sentenced. Hence the legal fiction which makes him serve two sentences at once is really for his protection, and neither crime can be brought up against him again after the sentence has expired.

G. W. G. wants to know whether the £2,000 insurance would be paid to the relatives of a person killed in a railway accident while travelling with a pass, and not an ordinary railway ticket.——The condition is that the person travelling shall have bought, and be in possession of, the current number of *P.W.* The question of the pass and ticket is one between the traveller and the company, and does not affect the insurance. It is quite possible for a traveller with a pass to have virtually paid his fare by services in respect of which the pass was given to him. A distinction of this sort would be manifestly unfair.

D. T. W. asks the origin of the word carat.——The smallest weight the Arabs used in trade was the grain of barley, four of which were equal to one sweet pea, called in Arabic carat. I have a great deal of information of this kind still unused if any readers care to apply.

F. W. T. asks how to choose a watch-dog.——My advice is to get some other creature instead. A friend of mine knows a man who has had a great deal of experience with watch-dogs, and he says they are worse than useless. He used to have one to sleep on the foot of his bed one time, because the man who sold it to him said, that once the dog was on the bed he would never allow any one to come near anyhow. It went all right for three or four weeks, except that the dog always insisted on lying exactly where the man wanted to put his legs, and then one night the dog went to bed early, and his master came in late, and, not being able to find a match, went upstairs in the dark. Then he saw what the man who had sold him the dog meant about not allowing any one to get near the bed. He called him "Good dog!" and "Here, old boy!" and when the brute showed signs of becoming aggressive, instead of merely offensive, he spoke to him kindly with the knotted end of a wet towel; but in the end he had to give in and sleep in a rug on the floor. No, watch-dogs are no good. They are the same during the day. They keep the butcher and the postman away, and get you into legal complications all round with your neighbours, while they greet an ordinary tramp like an old friend, and lead him round to the larder as a matter of mutual satisfaction. A watch-dog will bark all right at a man who is going away, and go for his heels, but if he is coming towards you the brute gradually retires in front of him, and finally takes up a position behind your legs, where he gets in your way and trips you over when you think it is time to move yourself. All this goes to show that watch-dogs are not to be relied upon, and that if anyone wants his house safely guarded the best thing he can get is a baby.

I **regret** to have to record a serious drop in the Irish circulation of *P.W.* A gentleman sent in some Replies which he considered to be correct, and, therefore, ought to be inserted. They were not inserted, and now he sends an ultimatum to the effect that, unless he receives a satisfactory reply, he will have to cease taking in the paper.——This, of course, is a serious matter to a small and struggling periodical like *P.W.*, but still, rather than violate the rule that only the *best* replies can be printed, we have resolved to reduce the office boy's salary, and worry through without the gentleman from Dublin.

The winner of £5, offered for the best drawing of the Elephant mentioned in "Fortune's Footballs" in the least possible number of straight lines, is Mr. J. C. Scott, 155, Comelypark Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

Many readers of *P.W.* will, no doubt, sympathise with the sentiment of a correspondent who signs himself **Soft-Hearted**. From day to day, he says, he constantly encounters people less fortunate than himself who make calls upon his charity; their appearance, their story, the very necessity which drives them to ask assistance from their fellow creatures awakens the desire to assist them in however small a way; nor would the occasional bestowal of a penny or a sixpenny bit or even half-a-crown make a very serious inroad on his pocket. "But when I do give anything in this way," he writes, "and it is an actual pleasure to myself to do so, I am invariably called over the coals for reckless encouragement of improvidence. 'The most unkind way of giving help,' says someone. 'A thoughtless stimulation of idleness,' says another. 'It will only be spent in a public-house,' remarks a third. I hear the same thing on all sides. I begin to feel as if I had committed a very foolish act. There is a lurking suggestion even of crime. And yet I know I should feel a much greater criminal if I turned a cold shoulder on all the poor creatures I met, or suavely advised them to apply to the local authorities, which is about as friendly to my mind as to advise a sinking man to learn to swim."——The point thus raised is a very interesting one. Those who have studied the question most, deplore irresponsible alms-giving. As a matter of economic science it is wrong, since by relieving poverty you increase it. But in spite of this the principle of human sympathy will assert itself. So great is the force with which it operates in some minds that it becomes advisable for whoever is thus moved to give alms, since, if he abstains from giving them, the violence that he does to his own nature is likely to inflict more mischief on himself than his charitable outlay could possibly inflict on the general interests of Society.

R. A. M. puts a test case for the burglary insurance: The family have gone to church, it's the servant's evening out, no one is on the premises, the house is burgled. Would the insurance be paid?——If R. A. M. will read the conditions of the insurance he will see that at least one adult must be on the premises at the time the burglary is committed. By "adult" here is not meant the burglar, by-the-way.

Below will be found a list of contributions to the **Fresh Air Fund** up to date. It is very gratifying to observe that, although the excursions are suspended on account of the winter months, the donations still flow in steadily:

Amount Previously Acknowledged, £258 12s. 10½d.

Mrs. E. Woodward, 5s.; South Australia, £25; P., 10s. 6d.; John Dormer, 5s.; "Conscience," 1s.; E. M. Wilkinson, 3½d.; Herbert (result of bazaar), 9s. 6d.; Anti-Swearing Club (H.M.S. *Mozarch*), 5s.; Florrie Jaquiss, 4s. 6d.; Back Miss Sexton, 1s. 6d.; C. B., 1s.; H. S. Uhlwich, 5s.; Incognito, 2s.; Back Number, 4½d.; Anon, 1s. 6d.; Jones, 5s.; F. A. F., 6d.; Gibraltar, 10s.; Xmas offering from Willie, Harold, Leo, and Dorothy Seckins, 2s. 6d.; P. Easte, 1s.
Collected:—H. Farmer, 1s. 6d.; S. Brundrell, 2s.; S.S. [illegible], Samdrang, 17s. 6d.; D. V., 1s. 6d.; Alva school children, 10s.; F. G. G. Ford, 2s. 6d.; W. A. Richardson, 5s.

Grand Total, £290 9s. 2½d.

POSTAL RATES.

Name of Publication.	One Year s.	One Year d.	Half Year s.	Half Year d.	3 Months s.	3 Months d.
Pearson's Weekly	8	8	4	4	2	2
Home Notes	8	8	4	4	2	2
Short Stories	6	6	3	3	1	8
The Sunday Reader	8	8	4	4	2	2
Athletic Record	6	6	3	3	1	8
The Big Budget	8	8	4	4	2	2
Love Stories	4	4	2	2	1	1
Pearson's Magazine	9	0	4	6	2	3
Dressmaking at Home	2	6	—		—	
Fashions for Children	2	6	—		—	
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P.W. can be obtained in Paris at Neal's Library, 248, Rue Rivoli, and at the principal Kiosks.

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FACTORIES WITH BAD NAMES.

Fate that Dogs their Owners.

"The divil has cussen his club ower that minnle," was the remark recently made to me about a hideous ruin of a factory planted in a lonely dell up in the North Country.

No one willingly passes the ruined mill after dark, for the place is said to be haunted. Further inquiry elicited the fact that several fortunes had been lost over it in its working days; and its weight of misfortune had wrought a succession of broken hearts and tragic deaths. In its luckless culmination of destruction by fire, two persons were burnt to death and buried beneath the wreck. No wonder its last owner ended his days in a madhouse.

This led me to reflect on the dwellings I had known, upon whose tragic walls an evil reputation hung—upon shops and workshops whose every successive occupant seemed foredoomed to misfortune, ruin, or death. But I was most struck with the number of large factories I had come across, which are reputed to be haunted, and also weirdly concerned in tragedy and ruination.

In the neighbourhood of Bradford there is a small mill, built originally for wire-drawing. It was burnt down and rebuilt at the cost of an insurance company. After subsequent failure, its then owner was discovered hanging from a beam—a case of suicide.

Several persons commenced manufacturing in the premises afterwards, but in every case they were burnt out. The place, until recently, has been empty for years. Its ill-luck becoming notorious, insurance companies fought shy of it, and no one would take it because it was popularly affirmed that "the ghost of Sammy —— sat across the balks."

Similar periodic ill-luck attended a series of cotton-doubling tenants in a romantic water-mill in one of the pleasantest vales of Derbyshire. They followed each other with intervening periods of twelve to eighteen months. All failed at the end of their third year's tenancy. The factory at present is unoccupied.

The site of another large mill in Yorkshire was bought out of the proceeds of a law suit. Before completion of erection there was a law suit about the riparian rights. There was further litigation before the place was occupied, and of the six tenants who subsequently rented loom and power as cotton-spinners, woollen manufacturers, and worsted spinners, all were ruined, with one exception, as the result of litigation with the owner.

The one tenant who won his case had little satisfaction in his success, as the defendant died almost as soon as the verdict was registered. The succeeding trustees failed to insure the premises, and had to recoup its value when the factory was burnt to the ground, whilst the litigation which ensued with the last tenant resulted in forming a legal precedent—a precedent equally hateful to liable trustees and for yearly tenants renting power without provisional agreements. Altogether the money expended in law far exceeded the original cost of the factory.

One would have supposed that the blackened ruin was the end of its grim history, but not so. Some time after, the half-decomposed corpse of a woman was discovered in the wrecked engine-house. This gruesome mystery was never cleared up, the remains were never identified, nor is it strange that quaking souls avoid the spot as a haunt of uncanniness.

Another "boggard-stricken" factory is a blast furnace situated on a lonely hillside, and from its unlikely position as regards transit of material and scarcity of ore, its erection must be regarded as evidence of unlimited folly on the part of the shareholders, most of whom lost heart and all in the silly speculation. One of these, in the despair of ruin, leapt into the flaming abyss during the operation of blowing out the blast. The place has an ill name, and no one passes after dark except in fear and trembling, though the premises were dismantled a generation ago.

On the moors between Lancashire and Yorkshire is the wreck of another stupendous factory. It is built on the road to nowhere, and is miles from a railway station. The stone and timber had to be carted miles for its erection, and, it is said, £100,000 was lost irretrievably on the building alone. The engine never ran a revolution. One man was killed on the very first day that excavations were begun, another labourer was killed as soon as the first stone was laid. And in desperation a ruined subscriber leapt to the ground from the sixth story on the day that operations were suspended.

For years the mill sank into gloomy decay, until a wealthy manufacturer bought it for a mere song, intending to pull it down to rebuild into cottages. The first day of carrying this purpose into effect the new owner died. And there it stands, a forlorn and haunted monument of folly to this day.

A manufacturer near Huddersfield spent half a lifetime trying to complete a factory, the two wings of which should form the largest mill under one roof in the Broad Shire. The Fates were against him; again and again the alternate wings were destroyed by fire just when his ambition appeared to be on the point of realisation. At the last fire, he caught cold, and died; and the lop-sided mill remains uncompleted.

A recent epidemic of suicides in a northern manufacturing centre, shows the popularity of one particular mill-dam or water-reserve for the dread act. A woman is now under trial for drowning her child in a mill-dam, which, to my knowledge, has been the place chosen for nearly a score attempted suicides—many of them successfully perpetrated.

I also know many mill-lodges (as dams are called in Lancashire), that have had from three to ten fatalities by suicide, murder, or accident; and which provoke an eerie sensation in the gloaming, when the groaning whees have lapsed into silence after the day's labour.

The most horrifying series of tragic circumstances I know, are associated with a London workshop, originally a house, but discarded as a dwelling-place after a revolting domestic outrage of blood-curdling character.

The back part, where the cleansing light of the sun's rays never penetrated, was used first by a shoemaker who was found laid across his "cratch" with his throat cut, whether by murder or suicide is unknown.

The next tenant, after a few days' occupancy, declared that the place was under a spell of queerness, and daily looking more worried and afflicted with the spell, at last vanished mysteriously. The next was there but a few weeks when he hanged himself from a hook in the ceiling.

The place remained empty a few months when the victim of a crime, details of which horrified the land, was found locked up therein.

Its ill-repute debarred the premises from further use, but the front part of the dwelling had meanwhile been used as a retail shop by a little army of tenants, who each suffered from the depression of association with the ill-omened premises, both then and afterwards. The place became the dumping ground of the neighbourhood's bailiffs, for every tenant suffered the misfortune of failure. Metropolitan improvements finally swept the premises out of existence, and with all its gruesome associations one would be prepared to say "none too soon."

"See the nice book Aunty Peace has given you, Johnny! Now, what do you say to her?"

"Huh! I say I wisht it was a gun."

Its Meaning.—Little Elmer: "Pa, what does 'requiescat in pace' mean?"

Professor Broadhead: "'Please stay dead' is near enough."

Dorothy, aged five, looked with awe and pity at the long, needle-pointed shoes of a young lady visitor, and then asked of her compassionately:

"Miss Ethel, ain't you only got one toe?"

Not Bad Cheek.—Mr. C. has just spotted a clerk staring into vacancy, with his hands in his pockets.

Mr. C.: "Well, Mr. Brown."

Mr. B.: "Yes, thank you, sir."

"They tell me, Grimley, that your daughter sings with great expression."

"Greatest expression you ever saw. Her own mother can't recognise her face when she's singing at her best."

An Apology.

We wish to tender our readers a most humble and abject apology. When we printed a largely increased number of the Christmas issue of *Pearson's Magazine* we anticipated being able to supply all the demands that would be made upon us.

We must own to a mistake. The Christmas *Pearson's* was entirely out of print in two days, although as the advance orders came in from the trade we had printed five large editions. At the present moment we have not a single copy on hand, and only here and there in solitary splendour can a copy now be seen in a newsagent's shop in any part of the country.

This week and last we have been inundated with letters imploring us for copies of the Christmas *Magazine* at any price. We cannot do it—we are sorry; but we cannot do it.

The Christmas *Magazine* is out of print, and must remain so. It is not like a daily or weekly newspaper that can be reprinted at an hour's notice. If readers would only understand and observe that golden maxim to ORDER IN ADVANCE from a newsagent there would not be these constant cries of disappointment.

This advice is doubly important at the present moment. The January number of the *Magazine* starts a new volume, and he will be a foolish man who omits to purchase it—to ORDER IT this day to be kept for him. This coming year we shall surpass all previous efforts. We are making no idle boast. If anybody is disappointed with the January number at sixpence we shall never be able to satisfy him, and he had better withdraw his patronage from us for ever.

We have undertaken to place *Pearson's Magazine* absolutely beyond compare. Large as the circulation is at the present moment it does not satisfy us, for there is one other magazine with a larger. Our New Year's resolve is that we shall ADD 100,000 new readers during 1898. We shall have to work hard to do this; we shall have to spend money like water; we shall have to give better than anybody else can give; we shall have to make every new reader feel that here is the best, here is the biggest, here is the brightest, here is the most he can ever get for sixpence.

THE FIDGETY PERSON.

Are You Ever Troubled in this Way?

There is a curious affection of the mind which causes more discomfort to the sufferer than many another more serious disease, and which, when once it has a firm hold upon an individual, is most difficult to cure. It is fortunately not very prevalent, and may be described as an unnatural state of doubt caused by extreme nervousness; but doubt carried to such a degree that it becomes almost a mild form of insanity.

A sufferer from this disease performs acts which no sane person would think of doing, and for the time being practically loses control of his better judgment as regards the points upon which he is doubtful.

A frequent cause of this malady is the placing of great responsibility upon a person with a sensitive nature, who is therefore not capable of bearing it, or of overworking a person not of robust health who is inclined to be scrupulously conscientious.

It may be that the key of a safe containing many thousands of pounds is placed in the charge of a naturally nervous person, and the knowledge of the fact that he is responsible for the safe custody of so much money causes the fear to arise frequently that he may some night forget to lock the safe before leaving the office. This fear grows little by little, until at last it torments him during the day and at night causes his rest to be broken by troublesome dreams. As a result, day after day he has doubts on leaving the office as to whether he has turned the key in the safe, and consequently he returns to give a pull at the handle to be quite certain.

So firm a hold does the fear take upon him, that at last he is unable to say three minutes after locking the safe whether he has really done it, so that he constantly gives nervous pulls to satisfy himself on the point.

It is from this stage that what may be termed the disease really begins. The fear of leaving the safe unlocked has so overwhelmed him, that he acts in a most stupid manner, and, curiously enough, does not care who sees him. He nervously locks the safe; pulls the handle two or three times to be sure he has locked it; then unlocks it without any reason for doing so; locks it once again; then finally pulls the handle violently.

This is not in any way an exaggerated case, because responsible officials so afflicted have been known to act in this manner. The clerks in a certain London office were used to seeing the senior clerk, an elderly gentleman, act in this curious fashion, and on meeting him going back to the office as they were leaving, they would smile at the thought that he was returning to have another pull at the handle of the safe. One clerk asserted that he had seen the poor old fellow actually peep into the keyhole! He was considered extremely nervous, the clerks called him peculiar, but beyond that, little attention was paid to his eccentricities.

Sometimes an overwhelming fear takes hold of a person who has frequent and important dealings in money. In one case a clerk who had every day to handle hundreds of cheques and bank-notes, was impressed with the idea that he would lose some of them, and when this fear was upon him, his actions were also most idiotic. He would get off his office seat, turn it completely upside down, and look anxiously about for any wandering cheques or notes. Not that he had lost any, but simply because he was convinced that some had been blown away or knocked on the floor.

A very mild form of this curious ailment, or it might be better described as a sign of susceptibility to it, is the nervous fingering of bank-notes by some persons. A bank clerk will count a dozen notes in so many seconds, then throw them carelessly into a drawer; whereas nervous persons finger a single bank-note as if they felt sure there were two stuck together, and seem loth to part with it. This punctilious care is also sometimes found in persons when they are giving change, especially gold, and those who act in this way have no idea how stupid they appear in the eyes of others.

Many persons are particularly nervous in turning out the gas, fearing that they will in the dark turn it on accidentally, and if this fear is not at once discouraged there is danger of its developing to an unpleasant extent.

A person can become so excessively nervous in this respect that he is not satisfied until he lights a match to be certain that the gas has not been left escaping. If he permits the disease to get a firm hold, he will possibly act in quite as senseless a way as the senior clerk referred to did.

There are many customs in which the milder forms of the ailment, or a predisposition to it, may be recognised. Some persons are scrupulously careful to blot what they have written, and will place the blotting paper time after time over a few words. Others look with irritating care that they have not left something in an envelope they are about to throw into the waste-paper basket, and will even take it out of the basket to examine it a second time.

Lastly, there are persons who, if they have much to do with figures, get exceedingly anxious. They carefully check a total, and, finding it correct, tick it in the ordinary way; yet, overcome by a fear that they have made a mistake, they go over the whole casting again, sometimes doing this time after time.

It is not at all improbable that what is usually termed "religious insanity" is only a very severe form of the ailment referred to.

In the Twopenny Double Number of the ATHLETIC RECORD, Frank Mitchell writes on "The Future of Rugby Football."

THE

Phantom Army.

Being the Story of a Man and a Mystery.

BY MAX PEMBERTON,

Author of "The Iron Pirate," "The Impregnable City," "Christina of the Hills," etc., etc.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LAST OF THE WHITE HUSSARS.

UPON an evening of July, six months after the rebel, Lorenzo de la Cruz, had died in the prison of San Sebastian, an Englishman, mounted upon an ambling white horse, rode out leisurely from the hamlet of Jaca towards the mountain town of Torla. He had for his companion a white-haired old Spaniard whom he called Damien, and he rode as one who wishes to observe and to carry away fruit of his observation. Scarce a house upon that road which had not interest for him; scarce a thicket or a hill which did not prompt him to a question. When, ultimately, he reached the amphitheatre of mountains in the heart of which Torla lies, he drew rein to study the scene more closely, and to make a note of the answers which the old guide returned to his searching interrogation.

"Yonder on the hill, old man—was that the house of Lorenzo himself?"

"No other, Excellency; that is the house of my master, God rest his soul. There is scarce left one stone upon another."

"And it was here in this valley that the last stand was made?"

The old man doffed his hat reverently.

"Here lie the bravest sons of Spain, señor—the White Hussars of Gavarnie. We shall never see their like again."

The Englishman smiled at his enthusiasm.

"They fought well, you say?"

"Like devils, Excellency! Let it be recorded when you come to write your book of which you make mention. Say that Spain, in her heart of hearts, honours them and carries their memory in her affections. Say that the day will come when she will avenge them!"

The novelist—for the traveller was a novelist come from his own country to finish a book upon the rising—looked at the old man very curiously.

"How?" he asked; "you believe that the Phantom Army is not dr[illegible]"

Señor D[illegible]'s eyes lighted up with a strange fire at this question.

"No movement is done with which is built upon a people's sympathy, Excellency. And Lorenzo lives in our hearts, and will live always. Write that down when you would speak about us. Say that I, Damien, was the servant of one whose name has its place for ever in the history of my country. Faithful in his life, I am faithful in death. Do me justice, señor, and let my name be written in your book."

The Englishman heard him with obvious amusement.

"Are there others in this town of Torla as faithful as you, old man?"

Old Damien sighed.

"The heart is willing but the flesh is weak, Excellency, and the Civil Guards are everywhere. How shall we speak of these things with bayonets at our throats? Yet the day will come! And there is one even in Torla who has not forgotten. One White Hussar still rides the hills, Excellency. Look up—you will see her on the hill side yonder! God pity her! She seeks the man her eyes will never behold again."

He pointed up to the forest-capped heights, and there, at the thicket's edge was an apparition which might well have moved that ignorant peasantry to awe. For a woman rode the heights, and a superb black horse carried her, and her bodice of white cloth was laced with gold as the uniform of the man she had loved; and in her pretty cap there waved a plume of feathers, and the sword of the dead Lorenzo de la Cruz was girded at her waist. Fearlessly she rode at the very edge of the outstanding wall of rock; the red light of the setting sun fell picturesquely upon her childish face and shot a thousand dazzling rays from the shimmering scabbard and the steel of that caparison. In all Spain, the Englishman had seen nothing more picturesque, nothing to win his admiration so ungrudgingly.

"Your White Hussar, who remembers Lorenzo, is a woman then, Señor Damien?"

The old man watched the girl disappear in the wood before the great cave of Torla, and then answered:

"It is Giralda, the gipsy, Excellency—the bravest heart in Spain. Remember her with reverence when you write your work. She loved my master, aye, God knows how well. She will wait for him here in these mountains until the end, señor."

He doffed his cap again towards the distant woods, and then exclaimed:

"Men wage the wars, but the women pay the price, Excellency. Let us forget a thing so sorrowful, and hasten, or night will trap us in the hills."

He put spurs to his horse and began to trot down the road. The Englishman followed him, but his eyes were still turned towards that place where the last of the White Hussars had drawn rein to watch him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ONE OF THE "TENTH."

ON the same day that the novelist from England saw Little Giralda, the gipsy, riding through the woods above Torla, a great banquet was given at the Savoy Hotel in London, by the officers of the 10th Hussars to their old comrade, Noel Falconer. A certain General of Cavalry, whom we met once before in these pages, was in the chair; and the imperturbable captain, who had always wished to be Falconer's friend, sat on his left hand. It was a brilliant dinner, the outcome of the common feeling in the regiment that fate had dealt hardly with one who had deserved well of his country. A cynic, however, might have said that it was the long-delayed recognition of the immense popularity which Falconer had won for himself in England.

With cynics this narrative has nothing to do. Rather let us watch the great hussar himself as he lurched up the room, and blushed at the applause which greeted him, and shook the hands stretched out to his, and took his seat like an abashed schoolboy, and flushed with shame when the General of Cavalry began to recite, with countless "hums" and "haws," and woeful reiteration, an account of the circumstances which have brought so many old friends together.

"We are here, gentlemen," said the General as he brought his ponderous speech to a conclusion, "to remind our old comrade—to remind him—that never once—I say—never once have we forgotten him—never once—I say—have ceased to be—proud of him; that we have followed with interest—and with attention—the lessons which he has taught us—in the hills of Spain; that we shall long think of him—as one who has brought glory upon his old regiment—and gladness to the hearts of his old friends—and who has remembered—even in the face of death—that he was an Englishman—and—in that capacity—has gone into action—with the name of the 10th upon his lips—and their spirit in his heart."

Falconer rose to his feet reluctantly when the long-drawn out applause had ceased. He was not a good speaker in the best sense of the term; nevertheless, the words in which he thanked his old comrades came from the bottom of his heart. They were received as the words of a friend and brother. Offering no excuses, holding himself up in some way as the sheep that had strayed, he asked them to believe that a memory of the 10th had kept him from many a deed which would have brought him shame, that it had given him strength to his arm and courage to his heart. "Still to be called 'brother' by them," that was his best reward. Many things had been said of him in England; he had heard many a good cheer since destiny brought him to London once more—but that night would remain the golden night of his memory.

From this expression of thanks, he passed on to speak of the dead Lorenzo and of that strange ambition which had terrorised Europe and written the name of the Phantom Army for ever in the history of Spain.

"I have lived with many soldiers," he said bluntly, "but this was the greatest soldier of them all. When his achievements come to be written, gentlemen, this will be remembered and will be the wonder of the historians, that one man with two hundred and fifty troopers at his back should have defied Europe for nearly a year, should have won the love of a kingdom, and come near to the very throne of Spain itself. Under other circumstances, if an army had been his to lead, our children's children would have read of a second Napoleon, it might have been of one who surpassed any general that has lived in our age or in the past. But Fate willed it otherwise and he who called himself a king has become the bandit of history. So are men's hopes built upon sand. Yet this man's name will ever be for me a splendid memory—the memory of a great soldier, of a great patriot—the name of one who has permitted me to come back in honour to my own country and to find again the dear friends I had lost."

Ringing cheers greeted him when he sat down. Men crowded about him to ask the hundred questions heard every day since he had set foot in London again. His pride was high as the hands of the men, who had been his friends, pressed his own in silent congratulation, perhaps even in self-reproach. Yet his heart was not in that room; and when other toasts had been drunk, and the hour permitted it, he said good-bye to them, and a carriage drove him swiftly to that gloomy house in Bayswater, at whose door he had seen, little more than a year ago, Isabella herself, that splendid apparition of a night of wonders.

A gloomy house then: but a gloomy house no more. For she whom he loved waited for him in the hall of it; and when his key opened the door, he saw the queenly figure of his wife, there at the foot of the great marble staircase; and running swiftly to her, he held her in his arms, and told her the glad news.

"Dearest wife—they have given me back my name!"

She lifted a rosy face to his, and kissed his hot cheek.

"And you will give it to the child," she whispered.

THE END.

SHE: "You ought to be ashamed of stealing a kiss."

HE: "You are equally guilty. You received the stolen goods."

HOST: "I suppose fights are of very common occurrence in your native town?"

Captain Longhorn: "Yes; there is so much fighting that when a disturbance is not taking place large crowds gather to see what is the matter."

CUSTOMER: "My wife has been pestering the life out of me to get her an easy-chair. She's always nagging about something, and if it isn't a chair, it'll be something else, and it's hardly worth while getting one; but, still, I thought I'd drop in, so as to see what you had. She'll be sure to ask."

Furniture Dealer: "Here, sir, is a chair so perfectly easy and comfortable that she'll fall asleep the minute she touches it."

Customer: "By Jove! I'll take it!"

NOW, AS TO THE MATTER OF BOOKS—

IT was only at the beginning of this year that we undertook the publication of books on at all a large scale. The idea that we had before our minds was to do for the book-reading public what we had already done for the readers of periodicals—to put before them the best possible work at the bottom price. That the public have appreciated our efforts in this direction is shown by the great success of the books for which—after the authors—we have been responsible.

One of the chief points we have insisted on is that all books should be put into the hands of the public with the leaves cut. A writer has estimated that 8,000 hours of the public's time were recently wasted in cutting the pages of one popular novel alone. And, anyway, it is a nuisance not to be able to enjoy a book without a paper cutter in one's hand. Special attention, too, has been paid to designing the covers, to the quality of the paper, to the excellence of the illustrations, and to the boldness of the type.

We shall be pleased to send a catalogue of all the works that we have issued during the past season to any reader of *P.W.* who cares to give us his name and address for this purpose. Meanwhile, special attention may be drawn to to the following as being particularly suited for Christmas presents.

A beautiful edition of the Works of Shakespeare, edited by HOWARD STAUNTON, with 824 illustrations by SIR JOHN GILBERT, R.A. In three volumes, handsomely bound in cloth. Price £1 1s.

MEN WHO HAVE MADE THE EMPIRE. By GEORGE GRIFFITH. With sixteen full-page illustrations by STANLEY L. WOOD. Price 7s. 6d.

(This book contains the life stories of those men who have done most to make our country what it is. So far from being dry records of facts, these narratives are of the most stirring and romantic order. From William the Conqueror's time, we are brought down step by step to the achievements of Cecil Rhodes. "It is impossible," says the SCOTSMAN, "not to be thoroughly interested by Mr. Griffith's treatment of the Empire-builders, and impressed by the lofty patriotic spirit that pervades the whole book.")

QUEEN OF THE JESTERS, by MAX PEMBERTON. With eight full-page illustrations by HAROLD PIFFARD. Price 6s.

(Mr. Max Pemberton, though quite a young man, is one of the most popular writers of the day. He is the author of the stirring romance at present appearing serially in this paper. "The book," says the SCOTSMAN, "is one to be enjoyed by everyone who takes it up.")

THE ZONE OF FIRE, by HEADON HILL. Price 6s.

(Mr. Headon Hill is another writer whose work is well known to readers of *P.W.* A previous story—"Guilty Gold"—was published by us first in serial form and afterwards as a book, when it achieved a notable success. "The Zone of Fire" is, if anything, of a more stirring nature. "It is a story of love and war," says the DUNDEE ADVERTISER, "and from beginning to end the reader is hurried from one exciting incident to another.")

THE INVISIBLE MAN, by H. G. WELLS. Price 3s. 6d.

(Mr. H. G. Wells, the brilliant writer, whose "War of the Worlds" has recently aroused so much interest, has studied in this book the peculiar case of a man who became invisible. Although in one sense a humourous book, it is in places deeply tragic, and similarly, although always light, the subject of invisibility is not treated frivolously by Mr. Wells, but from a scientific aspect. Speaking of this novel, the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS says: "It will greatly enhance the reputation of a very ingenious story-writer. Mr. Wells has a remarkable faculty of invention and a still more remarkable gift of persuasion.")

THE SKIPPER'S WOOING, by W. W. JACOBS. Price 3s. 6d.

(Mr. Jacobs, who first became known to the public as the author of "Many Cargoes," makes in "The Skipper's Wooing," his first attempt at a long story. How successful this attempt has been, is shown by the enormous popularity of the book. "It contains scenes," says the DAILY TELEGRAPH, "that we shall not be able to recall without a smile for many weeks to come. . . . It is a good story, well told, and full of humour and drollery.")

FORTUNE'S FOOTBALLS, by G. B. BURGIN. Price 3s. 6d.

(The MANCHESTER COURIER says: "The telling of the story is excellent. Its characters are worthy of the Dickens who wrote 'Nicholas Nickleby.'")

THE TYPEWRITER GIRL, by OLIVE PRATT RAYNER. Price 3s. 6d.

(This book, written under a name unknown to the British reading public, has had an enormous success. The story told is of a girl who, having to make her own living, does so by entering an office as a typewriter girl. Incidentally she has more than one adventure on a bicycle and is altogether a very up-to-date but very charming young lady. Criticising the book the SUN says: "It possesses a fresh felicity of style, a piquant novelty and charm of outlook that mark it out from the soon unremembered 'books of the hour.'")

Have you seen "The Pretty Girl Over the Way"? This is the title of a splendid complete tale in the Christmas Number of SHORT STORIES.

SPORTS AND RECORDS.

PROBABLY no game has ever been able to count upon so much popularity, and so many opponents, at one and the same time, as football. When it was first played it would be hard to say, but in one form or another the game has existed for centuries. In its early days, football was played with boisterous vigour, closely approaching brutality. Attempts were made to stop the game, but without success. Of recent years, football has developed at a marvellous rate, till at the present time its votaries, players, and enthusiastic supporters can be numbered by the million.

EVERY boy knows that Rugby school may fairly claim to be the cradle of paperchasing, otherwise known as "hare and hounds." It has always taken the lead among schools at that over-popular sport. Early in the century those much abused youngsters, the "fags," carried the paper, torn in shreds, in bags slung over the shoulder, while the præposters, armed with horsewhips, followed in hot pursuit. One of the favourite "Rugby runs" is the "Crick," 12¼ miles, which has been covered in a little over an hour.

ATHLETIC sports in the olden times always included a series of wrestling contests. At one time it was the favourite pastime of the Greeks. In Lancashire they adopt a catch-as-catch-can style. In Devon and Cornwall wrestling on the catch-hold principle still finds favour. The last-named system is a perfect drawing-room entertainment compared to some methods of bygone days. Kicking is now forbidden, and the men usually wrestle in their stockinged feet, a great improvement on the old style, when heavy boots shod with iron were freely used as a means of attack and defence.

RUNNING is perhaps pre-eminent as a means for giving a man a sensation suggestive of sudden death. It develops less skill than many other sports, for the directions which can be given as to style in running are comparatively few, and an awkward runner more frequently wins by sheer superiority of lungs or legs. We don't dispute this; the fact remains. 100 yards was covered by E. Donovan, at Brockton, America, September, 1895, in 9 3-5 seconds; while the redoubtable W. G. George, on August 23rd, 1886, at Lillie Bridge, completed a mile in 4 minutes 12¾ seconds, the best time on record.

SWIMMING is a delightful pastime, and from time immemorial its usefulness has been universally acknowledged. No greater stimulant was ever given to an art than Capt. Matthew Webb gave to swimming, when he crossed the English Channel. It was a stupendous feat. He started from the Admiralty Pier, Dover, on August 24th, 1875, and reached Calais sands in 21 hours 45 minutes.

OF undoubted antiquity, but still in great favour, is the old English pastime of "bowling on the green." It affords pleasant recreation to thousands who are past the age for the more violent exertions of cricket or football. Every village has its club and "green," and most of the larger towns have them in every district. Its great drawback as a popular game is the expense of preparing the necessary smooth fine turf green, this being, according to circumstances, from £100 to £300, or even more.

NO special argument is required to show that boxing, often alluded to as the "noble art" of self-defence, is undoubtedly a useful acquirement. It must in fairness be allowed, whatever view is taken of pugilism, that nowhere in the world has greater courage and pluck been shown than in the prize ring, where the boxer's dogged "game" has often shown how an apparently hopeless struggle can be turned into a victory. Even now, the fight on May 31st, 1860, between the disabled, and thus practically disarmed, Tom Sayers, and his gigantic antagonist, Heenan, is spoken of as though it was but yesterday.

SKATING in the good old times was accomplished on the shin bones of animals, bound to the feet after the manner of our steel appliances of to-day. Mr. Plimpton, of New York, introduced the roller skate which was at one time so popular, though a kind of wheeled skate was in use in Holland as far back as 1770. The Fen men of the eastern counties of England have no difficulty in holding their own, and they frequently win at the international contests in Holland, Norway and Sweden. G. "Fish" Smart Champion of England) has covered a mile (on the straight) in three minutes.

ANGLING is a good old-fashioned sport, and some of the more enthusiastic devotees to the gentle art now journey as far as Norway, where salmon fishing can be enjoyed to perfection. Excellent sport is found in the larger Scottish lochs, where gigantic trout are caught. It is a thoroughly game fish and fights to the death. In France the fishermen of Brittany sow their sea-fishing grounds with cod-roes to attract the sardine to their nets, but in Scotland the sailors can take sprats in millions without a lure.

THE record backward jump of J. Darby, of Dudley, took place at Haden Hill Park, September 14th, 1891. It proved to be no less a distance than 12 feet 11 inches, truly a remarkable performance. His standing high jump (with ankles tied) is exactly 6 feet. His three standing jumps (bare feet) covers 40 feet 11 inches, the same, with weights, 41 feet 7 inches. This last feat was performed before a crowded audience at the Westminster Aquarium, London, November 5th, 1888. In four standing jumps (with weights) he cleared 50 feet 4 inches: in his final jump Darby made a magnificent leap of 15 feet 5 inches.

HOCKEY at its best—that is, on a frozen lake—has been described by an enthusiastic writer, as a wild, glorious game, almost maddening in its excitement. The ball, of tough seasoned cork, at a moderate blow from the club, skims along the ice with lightning-like rapidity. Of course a sharp look-out is necessary for rough surfaces and unsafe spots in the ice, while the breaking of a buckle, or snapping of a screw, when dashing along at full speed, is no laughing matter to the player.

LACROSSE, it is said, originated with the Indians of Canada. It is played somewhat on the principle of football, except that the ball is carried on an implement called the crosse; the player in possession of the ball runs with it towards the enemy's goal, if on the point of being caught he tosses it to one of his own side or throws it over his head in the direction of the goal. Manchester may claim to be the home of lacrosse in England, and the past year has seen clubs spring up in the suburbs and most of the neighbouring towns.

EVERY officer on joining the British Army is put through a course of gymnastics, of which fencing forms a considerable part. Fencing with the rapier or foil is admitted to be the best exercise that can be taken. Every muscle of the body is brought into play, while hand and eye are trained to act in unison. Some very pretty exhibitions of fencing are often seen on the stage, and a realistic duel with swords, sandwiched into the play is always appreciated.

THE game of fives is one of the simplest and in all probability the most ancient of all in which a ball is struck by the players alternately, either against a wall or over a dividing partition. The ball is a small round one, covered with wash-leather which is a little protection to the player when stopping a fast shot. The hands may be a little tender at first, but the best exponents of the game dispense with gloves as being clumsy and unnecessary; they find, after practising for a time, that the hands become hard enough.

IT was in the middle of the seventeenth century that Louis XIV. first brought the game of billiards into fashion, that royal personage having been ordered by his medical advisers to take exercise after meals. The earliest description of English billiards is found in Cotton's "Compleat Gamester" (1674), the bed of the table being made of oak or a slab of marble. J. Roberts may be justly regarded as the Grand Old Man of billiards, his sensational break of 1,392 made at Manchester, 1894, still remains the best spot-barred break on record.

CRICKET, although stigmatised by an old magazine as levelling and mischevious, and defined by Dr. Johnson as a "sport at which the contenders drive a ball with sticks, in opposition to each other," has become a national pastime, by which Englishmen may be recognised in every corner of the earth. One great merit which cricket has now is the absence of gambling. At one time when matches were made for money, and each side had its avowed backer, they were bought and sold as a matter of course, and it was well known that certain players were practically under the thumb of the book-maker. The Grand Old Man of cricket, W. G. Grace, was for twenty-four years the only batsman of modern days who made two separate hundreds in a first-class match. Dr. Grace organised the Gloucestershire County Club in 1871 and has played for his county ever since.

ROWING, to a vast portion of the British public, simply recalls that great annual struggle, the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. Naturally the training of the 'Varsity eight is very strict. In earlier contests, two crews simply set to work with raw, uncultivated strength shoving a heavy bulk by main force through the water. In the graceful skiffs of the present day it is essential that strength should be applied at the right moment and in perfect harmony. The selection of the light and dark blues is by no means an easy task, the captain requiring as much skill and tact in composing a crew, as a Prime Minister in forming his Cabinet.

EXTRAORDINARY as it may appear, upwards of £20,000 per annum is spent on homing pigeons. It is a considerable time since the value of these birds was recognised for military purposes; now they are largely used in this country as a medium of sport. A fledgling or "squeaker" will fetch about a guinea, while a racer, or stud-bird, may be worth anything up to £60. In a race which took place in July last, the winning bird covered 501 miles, with an average velocity of 1,429 yards per minute for the entire distance. The rate at which homing pigeons fly is almost incredible. With a strong "tail-wind" these birds will accomplish 60 miles an hour with the greatest ease.

CYCLING, if rationally pursued, may unquestionably be regarded as one of the boons and blessings of the 19th century. Utilitarian to a high degree, it is health-giving to a measure that causes many of the leading medical men to recommend its adoption in nearly all cases where there is no organic disease. Compared with the modern safety, the "bone-shaker" of our forefathers was a fearful and wonderful machine, composed chiefly of wood and iron, while the springs were mostly conspicuous by their absence. Happily the inventive genius of an Englishman supplied the missing link—the rubber tyre—which with the suspension wheels and steel frame, introduced at a later period, made the modern bicycle.

ONLY those who were there to hear or take part in it, can form any idea of the enthusiasm that went up on Epsom Downs on Wednesday, June 3rd, 1896, when it became known that H.R.H. the Prince of Wales had won his first "Derby." Even those who had no sympathy or regard for "the sport of Kings," could hardly help feeling a thrill of satisfaction at the event. The Prince's horses took part in twelve races during the season and brought their royal owner no less than £26,819. Mornington Cannon seems to have been the "winning" jockey of 1896, he having steered 164 horses to victory, out of a total of 724 mounts, all of which illustrates most conclusively "the glorious uncertainty of the turf." According to a sporting contemporary, millionaires have sprung to the front in the sporting world—in mushroom fashion—with unfortunately the minority only proving themselves sportsmen; they are mere followers of Mammon, disdaining the course and the paddock, but keen on the wealth of the Ring.

REYNARD provides capital sport for huntsmen and hounds and (though his opinion may be a little biassed) he begs leave to suggest, through the medium of *P.W.*, the advisability of allowing him a little breathing time, instead of hunting him so persistently in and out of season. The practice certainly should be discouraged, for the number of brushes each season is getting smaller and beautifully less. One of the leading dailies taking up Reynard's cause aptly remarks: "The unwisdom of killing the goose which lays the golden eggs, has passed into a proverb, and the analogy may be extended to the destruction of vixens at a period of the year when the cares incidental to the reproduction of the species render them an easy prey to a pack of hounds."

DISC-THROWING, the popular game of the ancients seems to have been the origin of our modern quoits, which are common in many parts of Great Britain. The "disc" of the Greeks and Romans was a circular plate of stone or metal, twelve or fifteen inches in diameter. The winner was the one who succeeded in hurling the disc the greatest distance. The modern game of quoits is very different. The rings of iron are thrown towards two pins called "hobs" driven into the ground, and surrounded by a bed of clay. It looks a very simple thing, but it requires a skilful player to "ring the quoit," that is, to successfully land the iron circles over the pins.

As a rule it is only at Christmas time that you get coloured pictures given away with a paper. HOME NOTES, however, is going one better. Beginning with an early issue in January, a magnificent coloured plate will be given away weekly with each copy.

THE IVORY QUEEN

By Guay Blee.

Author of "The Disappearance of Norman Leigh," etc., etc.

Illustrated by Ernest F. Sherie.

CHAPTER I.

The Murder at the Grange.

"Half-an-hour late! Of course she is, what can you expect? It wouldn't have surprised me if she had been an hour. There must be a foot of snow in the hollows between here and Exeter."

"Eh, it be a mortal bad winter, never had such a stiff one since '81, that was the year as I had twenty cows a-froze to death in one night."

"Yes; I've heard all about those cows before."

"It was 'er most 'strordinary affair. I said to myself as I went to bed the night afore: 'Now I shouldn't be s'prised if some of them cows ain't froze in the mornin'.'"

"She's signalled."

"And I said to myself just as I was going to sleep: 'I shouldn't be s'prised if some of them cows ain't froze to death in the mornin'.'"

"And you got up in the morning and twenty were dead?"

"Yes, but the 'strordinary part of the thing is I said to myself: 'I shouldn't be s'prised if some of them cows ain't froze.'"

"Well, never mind the cows. Here she comes. Are you taking anyone?"

"One gent to Norcombe, that's all. Things ain't a bit like they was when I was young, and when they gets the new railway line I s'pose I shall have to go into the workhouse."

A rumble in the distance growing nearer and louder gives warning of the approaching train, and in a few seconds the express from London comes to a standstill in Barnstaple station, and a solitary passenger alights, and stamps his feet vigorously upon the platform.

The station-master, forsaking the individual whose sole conversational powers seemed to be confined to reminiscences upon the untimely death of his twenty cows, enters into a lively conversation with the engine-driver as to the state of the road between there and Exeter, while the driver is equally anxious as to its condition between Barnstaple and the end of the journey at Ilfracombe. The few passengers in the train gaze anxiously out of the steamy windows and growl disconsolately: "Only Barnstaple!" "What a train!" Then the engine gives a mournful hoot, a disconsolate and fatigued kind of pull, and slowly they leave the station, and issue forth into the night once more.

The lights are lowered, and Barnstaple relapses into slumber.

"Well, that's a bad journey over," soliloquises the traveller left upon the platform, as he endeavours to restore his circulation by a variety of ingenious adaptations of the cellar-flap. "Now for the worst part. Seven miles along country roads in some ramshackle conveyance that they dignify by the name of a fly because it only crawls."

"Be you the gent as wants to go to to Norcombe?"

"Yes. Have you got a fly?"

"It would be no matter of use a-trying to get four wheels to Norcombe, so I've brought a dogcart, and I don't s'pose we'll get there in that. It be a mortal bad night."

"Well, we'll try, eh?"

"Eh, yes, we'll try," the man answers in a melancholy voice, as he clambers into the high dogcart, while the passenger takes a seat by his side, and glancing at the horse, estimates that the driver is not very far wrong, and that they are not likely to get to Norcombe after all; but in two seconds he has altered his opinion altogether, and arrived at the conclusion that he doesn't know a horse from a tenpenny nail.

"My dear old chap," he would often say afterwards in recounting the incident to some particular chum. "If you want a sure cure for *ennui* or a sluggish liver, try a seven miles ride on a frosty night, with the roads like a sheet of glass, behind a Devonshire nag. Tobogganing in Canada's a fool to it. If you'd seen that horse, that looked as if he couldn't raise enough energy to drag a hearse, take a slippery hill, nearly as steep as the side of a house, at an easy trot, without so much as winking, you'd have gasped, and when he got to the top and went full speed down the other side, your only regret would have been that you hadn't doubled the amount of your accident insurance. Of all horses in the world give me a Devonshire breed, as fast as a racehorse, and as sure-footed as a mule. Fancy my boy, a seven miles drive on a frosty moonlight night behind a quadruped who treated the whole affair as a joke, and then imagine a fool of a yokel, with the reins in his hand, who did nothing but say: 'He can't go like he used to. He's getting old and lazy.' It was a drive I've never forgotten, and one I'm never likely to forget."

"It's a mortal bad winter," the countryman again observes, as they spin over the frost-bound road. "Mortal bad."

"Yes, it's a bit severe."

"Ah, we've never had such a winter since '81, when I had twenty cows all a-froze to death in one night."

"Ah?"

"Yes, and the 'strordinary thing was that I said to myself as I went to bed: 'Now I shouldn't be s'prised if some of them was froze in the mornin';' that's what I said the night afore."

"Then why didn't you get up and try to make them warmer?"

The driver turns a look of blank astonishment on Herbert Darrent. It is the first time that such a reasonable suggestion has been offered to him, and its novelty is a bit bewildering.

"Lunnoners don't understand cattle," he grumbles at last, and falls to ruminating why he didn't get up and do something for those twenty cows, but as he cannot arrive at any satisfactory solution he presently breaks the silence again.

"You've just come up from Lunnon, eh?"

"Yes."

"Ah, what do they think of us?"

"Think of you?"

"Eh, what do they think of our murder?" he explains with a ghoulish appreciation of the unenviable notoriety that Norcombe had suddenly achieved. "Have you heard about it, sir?"

"Oh, yes, I saw something in the papers—Mr. Marsden at the Grange."

"Eh, that's right, old Marsden. Close fisted old Marsden! He was a rare miser he was, sir. If young Marsden comes into the property things will be better; but he's a wild devil."

"Son?"

"Eh?"

"Marsden's son?"

"No, picked him up somewhere—perhaps he is—you never know."

"Who murdered him?"

"Dunno. Like to shake hands with him."

"Indeed! You seem an amiable kind of individual."

"Bah! Good riddance to bad rubbish. I was going along all right till he raised my rent so that I couldn't make both ends meet, and it be mortal bad times, sir, with such a mortal bad winter; I mind me, sir, that we never had such a winter since '81."

"Yes, yes. You told me about that and the cows. Now as to this murder. Have the police no clue?"

"No, can't have any. It was done by ghosts. The Grange is haunted."

"Oh, indeed! Then you'd like to shake hands with a ghost?"

The countryman shivered, and glanced half apprehensively over his shoulder; then, sinking his voice to a mysterious key, he continued: "Someone went into the house and murdered old Marsden, and never came out again, and he's not there now, and no one but a ghost could do that."

"Really?"

"And I'll expect we'll have one of them clever detectives coming down from Lunnon, but he won't find out anything, 'cause it was done by a ghost, and no detectives can catch ghosts. Whoa!"

The horse is pulled up with a sudden jerk.

"This is Norcombe. The Nine Bells, eh, sir?"

"Yes."

"If you'd like to have a look at the Grange, it's about a quarter of a mile up on the right."

"Thanks. I'll stroll up in the morning—good-night."

"Good-night."

Herbert Darrent climbs out of the dogcart, the driver gathers up the reins, sets the horse's head homewards, and the animal canters off as lively as ever.

The man stands at the door of the village inn in the ruddy light streaming through its short crimson curtains until the vehicle is out of sight, and then turns and walks thoughtfully down the main street until he reaches a cottage dignified by the legend "Police Station" inscribed in large black letters on a white board—primitive abode of the law as represented in the person of a young constable in a very badly-fitting uniform who is just quitting the house, and smartly salutes as he opens the gate.

"Are you Mr. Dobson?"

"No, sir; he's inside."

"Off duty?"

"Yes, sir; it's my round."

"Then I won't detain you; but I shall want to see you in the morning—early."

"Very good, sir; I'll be here at nine sharp. Good-night sir."

"Good-night."

"Smart young fellow that," Darrent observes to himself, as he pushes open the door. "Thank goodness they're not all so fossilised as my prosy driver!"

The door opens right into the kitchen of the cottage where Mr. Dobson, Senior Constable of Norcombe, is lounging in his chair before the fire. The constabulary cares of the day are over, and he is smoking an exceedingly dirty clay pipe and revelling in the luxury of purely animal idleness as only a man of absolutely enfeebled intellect can. Still, he can be pompous at times, as befits one who holds, and has held for a round dozen years, the important post of Senior Constable of Norcombe, an office that is little more than a sinecure, and, removing his pipe from his mouth, he gazes at his visitor with an expression of mingled annoyance at being disturbed and the importance that befits his position.

"Well," he inquires, after examining Darrent from head to foot, "what's the matter with you?"

"You are Mr. Dobson, I believe?"

Mr. Dobson nods.

"Policeman?"

"Constable, sir; Senior Constable of Norcombe."

"Well, it's all the same," Darrent rejoins. "I'm an officer from Scotland Yard. Perhaps you have heard my name—Herbert Darrent."

"No, never heard of it before," answers Mr. Dobson, at once conclusively proving himself to be an idiot of the first water by confessing that he is unacquainted with the name of the man whom the newspapers are never tired of calling "The English Lecoq." "Never heard it before."

"Ah! well, that doesn't matter after all," the visitor continues good humouredly, "of course, you know that Scotland Yard very rarely interferes outside London, leaving everything to the local authorities, but in this murder at the Grange, Mr. Dobson, they have deemed it expedient, in face of the fact that there is more mystery than usual enshrouding the matter, not to leave the case entirely in the hands of the County police."

Mr. Dobson again nods his head.

"Here are my credentials; you will see that from to-day I

A PRIZE OF £1 1s. 0d. In making the sketches for this story, the artist has purposely introduced some discrepancies into the drawings. To the reader who first points out the greatest number, a cheque for a guinea will be forwarded, and a penknife to each of the next twenty-five. Attempts must be written on half a sheet of note-paper with the page, column, and line indicated, as well as the position of the sketch. Envelopes to be marked "Queen," and to reach here not later than Monday, January 10th.

lieve you altogether of the case, and you are instructed to ford me all the assistance I may require."

Mr. Dobson is nettled, and shows it.

"Then," he answers sharply, "you've come on a wild goose chase. No one can solve the mystery of the murder."

"Just the sort of case I like. Now then, let me know all the particulars, or, rather, let me see if I'm right in my facts so far, as you seem rather slow of speech, Mr. Dobson."

The Senior Constable puffs his fat cheeks in indignation, but something seems to warn him not to answer, and he is wise enough to obey.

"Now then," says Darrent cheerily, as he takes a seat and refers to his pocket-book, "stop me when I go wrong."

Again Mr. Dobson merely nods.

"Josiah Marsden lived at an old rambling house known as the Grange, a quarter of a mile from here—lived a solitary life—reported to be a miser — only two or three rooms used—no servants—a woman came every morning for a few hours, and did what was wanted. She went as usual on the 12th of this month, found Marsden dead, killed by a stab from a large clasp knife which was found there, no other clue of any kind. Is that right?"

Mr. Dobson, who has been sagaciously nodding his head in assent to each sentence as Darrent has read it out, now nods it more emphatically as he concludes, and after taking a few whiffs at his pipe, asks: "What's the reward?"

"Nothing unless the relatives offer it."

"Oh!"

"Now, then, what can you add to what I've read?"

"Something that will puzzle the clever Scotland Yard lot with all their brag," Dobson answers with a grin. "On the night of the murder there was a heavy fall of snow, it began at eleven and ceased at one, and none has fallen since in Norcombe."

"Well?"

"The murderer entered at the front of the Grange—went right in through the street door. I traced his footsteps from the gate to the door."

"Yes."

"That's all."

"What do you mean?"

"He never left. There were no footsteps *from* the house."

Herbert Darrent bends his head in thought for a moment. Here was the Senior Constable repeating exactly the same story as the driver of the dogcart had told him. He knits his brows and ponders, attempting to solve the problem.

"Very well, go on," he says at last. "Anything else?"

"Nothing," shortly replies Dobson, annoyed at the indifferent air of the detective. "I suppose you know the murderer already, eh?"

"I think, Mr. Dobson," he quietly answers, "if you've any respect for the post you hold you'll keep that silly tongue of yours quieter. Murder is not a joke specially arranged for a country constable to air cheap wit upon."

The man flushes with wounded pride, and glares at the fire.

"I'm getting sick of the whole blessed thing," he growled at last, "being cross-questioned twice in one day by Scotland Yard detectives is enough to try anyone's temper."

"What!"

"First one detective then another, it's sickening."

"Do you mean to tell me you've had a detective here before me?"

"Yes—this morning."

"From Scotland Yard?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"He said so."

"Oh! he said so, did he, Mr. Dobson, and you believed him? Did you ask him for his authority?"

"No."

"Then you're a fool. Wake up man, wake up, rouse yourself. What was he like? What did he do? What did he say? Where is he?" shouted Darrent in short, snappy sentences like pistol shots.

"How do I know where he is? He came this morning and said he'd just arrived by train from London, and had driven over."

"What time was that?"

"Ten."

"Then how the deuce could he come from London?"

"I never thought of that."

"No, of course you didn't, Mr. Dobson; go on."

"He said he'd come to look into the murder, so I took him up to the Grange and told him all about it."

"Well, is that all?"

"I showed him the knife."

"Which, of course, you let him take away."

"No, I didn't; he didn't ask for it."

"Oh! That's a relief anyhow. Then he didn't take anything away?"

"Yes, he did."

"What?"

"Some chessmen."

"Chessmen?"

"Yes, a set of carved Indian chessmen—horses and elephants and things. He said that Scotland Yard had an idea they had something to do with the murder."

"A set of carved chessmen—ivory, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"You're sure he took nothing else?"

"Certain."

"Very well, Mr. Dobson, I shall report your idiocy at headquarters," Darrent remarks as he finishes writing in his pocket-book and rises from his seat. "What the deuce," he mutters to himself, "did he take a set of chessmen for and leave the knife, and who the dickens is he?"

"Do you want to know anything else?" Dobson sulkily asks, as he relights his pipe which he has let go out during the cross-examination.

"Yes, give me the name and particulars about everyone related to or friendly with the dead man. Any sons?"

"No, at least I don't know, perhaps he is his son. You never know. Old Marsden always said he adopted him. I don't believe it."

"Never mind what you believe, Mr. Dobson. I'm asking for facts. Well, who is it?"

"Astray Marsden."

"Astray—curious name."

"Yes, old Marsden said he was a stray when he found him, and he stuck to the name. It was his joke."

"I see. Where is this Astray?"

"Quarrelled with old Marsden a couple of years ago and went abroad."

"Oh! never been seen in Norcombe since, eh?"

Dobson hesitates under the keen eyes of the detective, who, it seems to him, is reading his inmost thoughts. It will be no good trying to keep anything from Herbert Darrent, so he suddenly blurts out: "Came back on the night of the murder."

"I see," says Darrent, again writing in his pocket-book. "What time?"

"I saw him about half-past ten."

"Did he seem strange in his manner at all?"

"Not particularly; only a bit excited."

"Did he mention old Marsden?"

"No."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At the corner of the road that branches off to the Grange."

"How was he dressed?"

"Long overcoat and soft hat."

"Was it snowing then?"

"No; didn't commence till eleven."

"Right. Thank you, Mr. Dobson. Now do you know anyone else connected with old Marsden either here or at Barnstaple?"

"Only one or two distant relatives and acquaintances."

"Very well. You can employ the rest of your evening by making me a complete list of them, and say all you know about them. Have it ready by the first thing in the morning, please. That's all. I shall have a good deal more to ask you to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night. Oh—er—I say, Mr.—er—"

"Darrent."

"Er—Mr. Darrent. Don't you think that Scotland Yard may find it worth while to offer a reward presently?"

It is the second time that Dobson has mentioned the chance of a reward being offered, and Darrent pauses for a moment, then suddenly confronts him.

"Now, look here, Dobson," he says gently, "you're simply playing the fool, and you've given the whole game away. Twice you've asked after a reward; that means you know something more than you have told me, and expect to be paid for your knowledge. Well, you're wrong, you won't be. You ought to know even if a reward is offered it is not paid to those in the service, whose duty is to do their duty. Come now, Dobson, own up all you know, and not half of it."

"I know nothing except what I've told you."

"Very well, then, Mr. Dobson, you'll never get any promotion from Scotland Yard or any reward, which your soul so hankers after."

"Then Scotland Yard will never know."

"Ha, ha, I've got you! So you *do* know who committed the murder! Very well, Mr. Dobson, very well; you are what the law calls an accessory after the fact. It's a very nasty position, Mr. Dobson. Good-night!"

"Half a minute."

"Good-night. I think an accessory after the fact gets about ten years."

"Stop!"

"Well?"

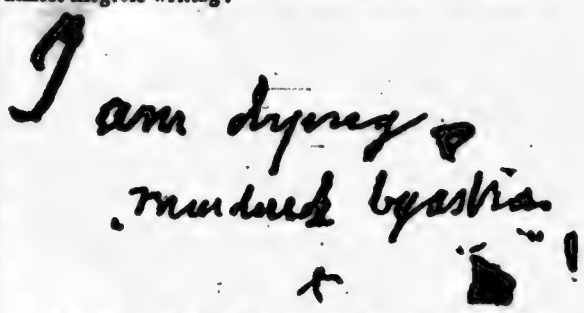
"I'll tell you all I know."

"That's better. The service would rather reward than punish. Now, show your sense by telling me everything you know, every iota, and Scotland Yard may probably look over your indiscretion, and remember you when the proper time comes."

Without answering, Dobson goes over to a desk, unlocks it, and taking out a stained and crumpled sheet of paper, hands it to Darrent.

"That's the murderer," he remarks, as the detective takes the sheet.

Darrent carefully examines the paper—a sheet of note-paper stained with one or two nasty smears—and then, in almost illegible writing:



And there it ceased, as the pen had evidently fallen from the dying fingers, and had rolled across the sheet, leaving blots in its track.

"Where was this?"

"Crumpled up in Marsden's hand."

"Murdered by Astra——"

"By Astray, don't you see? He hadn't strength to finish it, the 'y' is missing."

"Hum! So Astray Marsden is the murderer, and you intended to hold this for the reward, or else blackmail Astray Marsden, eh?"

"I put it by and forgot it."

"That's a lie, Dobson," he answers, as he carefully folds the paper, and places it in his pocket-book. "You couldn't have forgotten it in a couple of days. Have you shown it to anyone?"

Dobson shifts uneasily, and tries to avoid the fixed gaze of the detective.

"Well. Answer up."

"Only to young Marsden—to Astray."

"When and where?"

"The day after the murder, at the Nine Bells, where he had put up."

"Well, what did he do?"

"Said he'd come round and see me later."

"Well, did he?"

"No, he bolted."

"I see. Well, Mr. Dobson, whether he committed the murder or not, I should advise you to be very careful, my friend. You may find that you've got yourself into serious trouble. To-morrow morning I go over the Grange, I shan't want you. Send your junior to meet me there at nine. Don't forget. Good-night."

Darrent turns on his heel and leaves Mr. Dobson to his own reflections, which to judge from that gentleman's expression of countenance as he moodily pulls at his pipe as he sits before the fire, are not of a very enviable description.

In the short walk from the police station to the Nine Bells, Herbert Darrent marshalls his facts.

The old man, reputed a miser, murdered, the footprints in the snow leading one way only. The return of Astray Marsden on the fatal night. The mysterious visitor of the morning, claiming to be a detective, who had taken merely a set of ivory chessmen, when one would have assumed that the weapon with which the deed was done would have been the first consideration. That factor in itself was a problem. Then there was the writing of the dead man that seemed to reveal the name of the murderer at once, and to make all clear. That paper accused the man who two years ago quarrelled with old Marsden, the man who only returned to Norcombe on the night of the murder, and had since fled—Astray Marsden.

Herbert Darrent felt that indeed all his art would be needed in this investigation, for he knew better than anyone that the cases that seemed to be over before they had really commenced very often proved to be almost unsolvable mysteries.

CHAPTER II.

Darrent Finds a Clue.

To say that Herbert Darrent passed a good night, would have been to have stretched veracity to breaking point.

It was cold in that small bedroom in the village inn, and the discordant clanging of the cracked bell of the church clock, from quarter to quarter, and from hour to hour, irritated him in his restlessness. His mind was far too active to allow his eyes to be wooed by slumber, and through the long watches of the bitter winter's night the few threads of information that he had gathered tangled themselves into twists and knots in his brain, and the very fact that *prima facie* the solution of the mystery seemed to be so simple, only served to worry and irritate him the more.

Detectives, after all, are only human beings, not mechanical contrivances, and their intellects, trained though they be to keener and clearer intuition than those possessed by ordinary men, do not render them free from the worries inseparable from complicated problems to which the solution is obscure.

Darrent lay awake for hours wondering and speculating. Those clues which seemed to point at once to the culprit, often, he knew, failed utterly upon closer investigation, broke off sudden and short; and once the thread snapped, one was left absolutely without the possibility of following the trail for another inch, and had to hark back to the very commencement again, only perhaps to have the same experience and the same result. One never hears of a detective's failure; it is only his victories that are noised abroad. One does not learn of all the byeways and cross-roads, all the narrow lanes and blind alleys that his search leads him into. It is only when success has crowned his patient task that one hears of him at all.

Once when he had dozed off for a little while, the dreary

Have you got S.S. Christmas Number? What! Not got S.S. Christmas Number? Then why haven't you got S.S. Christmas Number?

monotonous recital of the untimely death of the wretched twenty cows disturbed his brain, and he awoke with a shiver to realise that whatever the winter of 1881 in Norcombe was like, to have killed the score of cows in one night, the winter of 1896 was quite as severe a one as he ever desired to experience. Thinking of the cows recalled the brief conversation he had with the driver of the dogcart. Evidently that individual did not think very much of Josiah Marsden, and, moreover, had admitted to having a grudge against the murdered man, because his rent had been raised. Was it possible that that man who told so glibly the story of a ghost, was implicated in the murder? Perhaps; one never knew. But against that supposition there was the paper that had been written by the dying man; the half-finished accusation that he had been murdered by Astray. What a colossal idiot Dobson was to have shown that paper to Astray; and directly Astray had seen it he had fled. That certainly looked like guilt, and yet might only be a sudden spasm of fear. Fear that a train of circumstantial evidence might be gathered together that would inevitably put the rope around his neck, be he innocent or be he guilty.

There were, indeed, many black factors in the case that pointed to Astray. Let him recapitulate them:

(1) Astray was not Marsden's own son, but had been adopted by him; and who could tell what Astray's antecedents were, or why Marsden had kept him?

(2) Astray and old Marsden had quarrelled and separated some two years back. Why?

(3) Astray had returned, after an absence of two years, on the very night of the murder. Why?

(4) The unfinished note written by the dying man seemed to accuse Astray of the murder.

(5) Astray had fled.

Yes, all these facts certainly did point to Astray Marsden as the murderer. All through the long winter's night the disjointed fragments of the puzzle jumbled themselves about in the perplexed mind of Herbert Darrent until the dawn broke grey and cheerless.

He gazed out of the window across the waste of snow to where, in the distance, the elms that fronted the Grange met his eye. Should he, he wondered, fathom the mystery of the midnight murder within that dwelling, whose smokeless chimneys stood out black against the wintry sky.

Breakfast, with its steaming coffee, its crisp toast, savoury rashers and new-laid eggs over, and Darrent felt another man, ready to commence his investigations, to piece together every tiny scrap, every minute fragment, until the whole puzzle was complete, the mystery solved, Josiah Marsden avenged, and justice satisfied.

Mine host, who waited upon the stranger from London himself, was of a communicative turn of mind. Oh, yes, he knew the Marsdens, father and son—at least they called him son—well enough. Josiah Marsden was a strange sort of a fellow—seemed to have no friends and no enemies. Visitors to the Grange were very rare indeed. Marsden kept himself to himself, and never associated with the inhabitants of Norcombe, went over to Barnstaple once or twice a year. Rarely had any letters. Now and again one with a foreign postmark, so the village postman told him, would come, or may be he would have a French newspaper, or a chess magazine. Young Marsden, ah, he was always a nice, affable young gent, he was. Many's the bottle he'd had in the room where they were now, and many more bottles he hoped to open for him. Yes, Astray Marsden stayed there at the Nine Bells on the night of the murder, and in the morning, after Dobson had called and seen him, left for Barnstaple.

"Bless your heart, sir," said mine host, as Darrent buttoned up his coat and prepared to start for the Grange, "there are some people who suspect Astray of the murder, but they might just as well suspect me, sir, just as well."

The irritating church clock chimed the hour of nine as Darrent reached the gates of the Grange and found awaiting him, erect as a soldier on parade, the junior constable of the previous night.

"Good-morning. I am glad to find you are punctual."

"Good-morning, sir."

"Any message from Mr. Dobson?"

"He hoped you would call upon him again this morning, sir."

"Right. Have you the keys?"

"Yes, sir," answered the constable, unlocking the gate as he spoke.

"I suppose you didn't see the ghost who committed the murder?" Darrent hazarded with a smile.

"Ghost," laughed the young officer. "Lord bless you, sir, there's no ghosts in Norcombe. I've heard the silly chatter about ghosts, and the Grange being haunted, but I don't believe any such nonsense, sir."

"Indeed!"

"No, sir, not a bit of it. There was flesh and blood on this job, sir, and it looks like a case of revenge, asking your pardon for presuming, sir."

"What makes you think that, constable?"

"Well, sir, as far as we can make out, nothing in the house has been disturbed, and no robbery committed."

"Well, let's get inside."

The constable unlocked the heavy door, and pushed it open.

"Now, go slowly," said Darrent as they entered, "and tell me all you know about the building."

The door banged after them, and the dull echo of the sound reverberated through the house.

The entrance hall gave access to rooms on either hand, and the constable, unlocking and opening a door on the right, stood on one side for Darrent to enter.

The room, which was at the back of the house and evidently the library, was a large and lofty apartment panelled in dark oak, and the old-fashioned furniture matched the decoration—solid arm-chairs with deep seats and sunk backs and a massive oblong table. The walls were lined with bookcases, but they were evidently very rarely opened, for Darrent noticed how thickly the dust lay in all the crevices where the glass doors shut. He walked slowly round the room. Two sides were entirely taken up by the bookshelves, while at the two others were the fireplace and a broad window. The chimney-piece, with its high mantel in carved oak, had a couple of cosy corner seats, one on each side. The window, which was opposite the fireplace, commanded a magnificent view of the distant snow-covered country for miles, and the windings of a river, its frozen surface glistening in the sunlight. Some dozen skaters were gliding over the splendid ice, and Darrent, after watching them for a moment, turned with a sigh from the scene. He could not yet afford time for indulging in an exhilarating pastime in which he delighted, and although a clear unbroken stretch of a mile or so of black ice temptingly invited him, duty called him, and duty must be done.

"Now then—by the way, what's your name?"

"Thompson, sir."

"Right; I daresay you know mine already—Darrent."

"Yes, sir."

"Is this the room where the murder was committed?"

"Yes, this is where we found him, sir," replied Thompson, indicating a spot on the floor between the table and the fireplace, where an ominous dark stain showed.

"Do you know the house at all?" asked Darrent, his eye upon the floor.

"No, sir; never entered it till the day after the murder. We searched the rooms, but, as you know, discovered nothing."

"Ah! who went over the house?"

"Mr. Dobson, sir."

"Ah, we'll go over together presently, Thompson. Now tell me is the room exactly as it was when the crime was discovered, eh? Nothing has been disturbed—nothing removed?"

"Exactly the same; nothing has been taken away except a box of chessmen. I suppose Mr. Dobson has mentioned that to you already, sir?"

"Ah, yes; they were called for yesterday morning, I understand, by a man who said he was from Scotland Yard."

"Yes, that's what he said, sir."

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir. Mr. Dobson saw him. I was on my round."

"I suppose you have never seen the particular set of chessmen?"

"No, sir."

"And have no idea what they were like?"

"Well, sir, I heard Mr. Dobson say that they were Indian work in ivory, very finely carved with figures, elephants, and men on horseback, and the like."

All the time that Darrent had been questioning Thompson, his eye had never ceased to wander over the room, from the window to the bookcases, from the bookcases to the lofty chimney-piece, and back to the window again. Those round panes in the doors of the dark oak bookcases seemed to Darrent to glare down at him like wide-open eyes. Wide-open staring eyes, that never closed night or day—eyes that had gazed down on Josiah Marsden score upon score of times—eyes that had witnessed the murder.

What was Josiah Marsden doing that fatal night? Was he sitting, solitary and alone, by the fire the grey ashes of which still filled the grate, reading one or other of those treasures of literature that lined the shelves?

Darrent walked round the room and minutely examined the fastenings of the bookcases. No, the dust proved that they had not been opened for weeks.

Had Marsden been seated there at the table with the chessmen and board in front of him, working out some problem, when the assassin had crept noiselessly in, stolen behind him, and stabbed him to death?

Was there nothing in all that room to afford one tiny clue to the murderer?

Had there been a struggle between the murderer and victim, and in it had there possibly been a tiny thread of material torn, or a button wrenched off, or an ornament broken, that could afford something of a clue? With eyes fixed on the floor, Darrent stood thinking, while Thompson waited respectfully on one side. Darrent paced the length of the room from the window to the fireplace several times, and pondered. At last he paused in one of his journeys, and gazed out over the whitened country. From the house to the river not a footmark marred the surface. The snow that had drifted on to the broad window sill was undisturbed. There had been no escape that way.

He faced round, and stood with his back to the light. The wintry sun was shining full into the library, and throwing a ribbon of colour across the floor, and in its track upon the polished wood something white glittered. It was only a tiny speck, but it caught Darrent's eye. He stooped, picked it up and examined it closely. It seemed to be a broken piece of ivory, a little mite of lace-like filigree. He looked at it in the full light of the window, and suddenly it dawned upon him that here was his clue, here in this tiny scrap; for Darrent felt confident that it had formed part of the ornamental carving of a chessman, and it was a set of chessmen that someone had been at great pains to secure from that very room.

Yes, here was the clue! Once let him trace the set of chessmen that had been obtained from the Grange, once let him find that one was damaged and satisfy himself that this fragment fitted, and the first step in the discovery of the murderer of Josiah Marsden would be accomplished.

He carefully wrapped the piece of ivory in a cigarette paper, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Now, Thompson," he said to the officer, who had been interestedly watching his proceedings. "I think I've seen enough of this room, for the present at any rate. Let us turn our attention to a thorough search of the rest of the building. The murderer seems to have entered in the ordinary way, but he did not depart the same as he entered, therefore, Thompson, he knew of some other means of exit, and what we have got to do is to find it."

Darrent had already arrived at the conclusion that the murder had been committed by someone who possessed an intimate knowledge of the structure of the Grange itself, and of some secret means of escape. There must be a secret means of exit from the building, of that he was confident, but where? That was the trouble, and that they would have to discover. That the entrance had been in the usual and ordinary way, and the exit in some unusual and extraordinary way, was certain, and that gave rise to two possible theories. One that the murderer was merely an ordinary visitor with originally no ill intent. Something—which might never be solved—had led to a quarrel with old Marsden, and that had ended in a struggle and his death; whereupon, the murderer, acquainted with the structure of the building, had escaped by the secret way; or, on the other hand, the assassin had entered with malice aforethought, determined, for some reason of revenge, upon the death of Josiah Marsden, intending, after the committal of the deed, to make use of the secret route, and leave no trace of his escape. In either case, it proved a thorough knowledge of the house, and the existence of some private means of exit, and that was what they must discover.

Together they left the library and commenced their search. From garret to basement they ransacked every room, but could discover nothing. Dust reigned supreme everywhere, and the most careful investigation revealed no possible hiding place or means of escape.

After several hours' thorough search, Darrent and his assistant conclusively satisfied themselves that the murderer was not concealed upon the premises. How then had he escaped? He had not gone out by the front door, then he must have escaped from the back of the Grange, and yet from the house to the river the snow lay in one smooth, undisturbed mantle of white. Not a tell tale mark betrayed the way of the murderer's flight.

On the left of the entrance hall, opposite to the library, was the only other room that seemed to have been in constant use, and at the far end, in the same place as the window was situated in the library, a fernery had been built, but it was bare of foliage now, and boasted only a collection of dry and withered shrubs. This was the last room Darrent entered. He stood in the conservatory and opened the door leading to the grounds; a flight of steps, protected by an ornamental iron awning, over which ivy and creeping plants had grown, led down to a covered trellised walk, where the thick, entwining foliage had kept the snow from penetrating. The walk extended from the bottom of the steps to an open rockery some fifty feet away, built in the dip of the ground. Large masses of rugged stone had been piled together, and rough hewn steps led down to a deep pool filled with rushes and aquatic plants. The pool, which was frozen and black, was overhung by drooping trees, whose pendent branches almost touched its surface. A charming spot in summer, with its moss grown stones, its white and yellow water-lilies, its creeping plants, and miniature waterfall plashing gently down. But now in the grip of the Ice King, its sylvan beauty was transformed as by a magic wand. It seemed a very fairy grotto; the overhanging trees gleamed white with frosted snow, glistening like diamonds, and from every rock hung fantastic icicles in all the beauty of an Aladdin's cave.

Darrent descended the steps and traversed the covered walk, which was entirely free from snow, until he reached the rough-hewn steps that led down to the pool, and, as he gazed upon the beauty of the scene before him, and admired the pendent branches frosted with their white, feathery powder, his keen eye was attracted by the slender trunk of a silver birch, which, some four feet from the ground, showed a space a few inches wide, absent of the snowy covering which decked the remainder of the tree.

A beautiful coloured plate will be presented weekly to every purchaser of HOME NOTES. This enterprising piece of business will begin early in the New Year.

He carefully examined the spot; it looked as though a hand had gripped it; then he bent down and scrutinised the earth at the foot of the birch. Yes, there was the mark as of a footstep. Anyone coming from the covered walk that

led from the conservatory to the rockery would have been able, without treading on any of the snow-covered ground, to have seized the trunk of that tree and so swung themselves down towards the bottom of the pool. Stepping carefully over the slippery stones, Darrent and Thompson reached the bottom and stood side by side upon the frozen surface.

Evidently someone had been there before them, for the impression of footmarks was visible, leading to the very back of the grotto. Following the track, they pushed aside the long streamers of creeping plants coated with ice that jingled musically as they moved them, and found the grotto extended some feet beyond, and then it seemed to cease, shut in by heavy masses of rock, but on closer approach a narrow opening at right angles became visible, and into this the footprints led. With an effort they forced themselves through the entrance, and into a kind of tunnel, at the far end of which a ray of light shone like a star. The floor of the tunnel was coated with ice, and evidently they were walking along the bed of a channel, by which the overflow from the grotto found its way out into the river.

Slowly and painfully they groped along in the darkness, stumbling and slipping upon the smooth surface of the ice and bruising their hands against the sides of the tunnel. Halfway through, the pathway grew narrower and lower, and it was only by creeping in a painfully stooping attitude that they could get along at all. The light grew nearer; they struggled on for a dozen or so yards more, and at length, through a tangled mass of shrubs and rushes, saw stretching before them the broad expanse of the river, while the musical ring of the skates sounded merrily in the distance.

The skaters passed, flying like the wind, along the stretch of perfect ice. No one was in sight, either to the right or the left, as, pushing aside the bushes, Herbert Darrent and his companion crept on their hands and knees from the narrow causeway out on to the frozen river, and the way of the escape of the murderer of Josiah Marsden was solved.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRACK.

ALTHOUGH the passage or tunnel by which the murderer had in all probability escaped from the Grange had now been discovered, Darrent was obliged to own to himself, as he stood upon the frozen river, that he was really no nearer learning the truth or solving the mystery.

What had proved a mysterious, supernatural factor in the crime in the eyes of the unsophisticated inhabitants of Norcombe, and had set their imaginations, such as they were, to work on the wild ideas of haunted houses and ghostly assassins, had after all turned out to be nothing.

Just what he had expected would be the explanation from the moment the story was related to him by the driver of the dogcart, had proved to be correct.

Footsteps leading into the house and no return, so that it seemed to Darrent there was but one solution—or rather two—either the murderer was still in the building, which was far from probable, or had escaped by a secret passage, and the latter had proved to be the case. And yet after all, he mused, as he made his way across the grounds back to the front of the house, it had proved his theory that the murderer of old Marsden was well acquainted with the Grange. Who should know the ins and outs of the premises better than the dead man's son, or ward, whichever he was—the one whose name the dying man had endeavoured to write—Astray Marsden? Again all the circumstances against Astray forced themselves upon his mind. What if it should prove to be no mystery at all? Young Marsden had returned, gone perhaps, straight to the Grange, quarrelled openly with the old man, and in a paroxysm of rage struck the blow which killed him.

Darrent took the paper from his pocket again and closely scrutinised it.

"I am dying, murdered by Astra——"

Astray had gone. Perhaps for fear of blackmail, perhaps because he was guilty, but whatever the reason, Darrent decided he must be stopped, and scribbling a few lines upon a form, he dispatched Thompson to the telegraph office, and again entered the library.

So far he had acted simply as a man of caution, but without conviction. He intended to stop Astray's flight, not because he was assured of his guilt, but because he *might* be guilty.

As a detective who had earned fame, he suspected everybody, but condemned none, until link by link he had forged the chain that was unbreakable.

As it was, so many incidents seemed to point to Astray, and yet one thing destroyed the whole theory—the stolen chessmen.

If he could trace them, he felt he would be a step nearer discovering the murderer, and with them the motive. That was the great difficulty in this case, the apparent absence of motive.

He was glad to be alone; while from a few fragments he endeavoured to make out what kind of a man the murderer was, and to fix in his mind the style of individual he had to look for.

Did the murder arise out of a sudden quarrel, or was it premeditated and accomplished in a few moments—the entrance, the murder, and then flight?

He began by supposing that it was the outcome of a quarrel, that the two men had been in conversation before the fatal blow was struck.

The old man probably sat in his chair on the right-hand side of the fire. Darrent took that chair himself; and the visitor—where? He had the assurance of the constable that nothing had been moved. There was no chair conveniently placed for a visitor. It might have been moved, or the stranger might have stood during the interview. That being so, he would have stood opposite Marsden, so Darrent rose and took the place of the supposed visitor, and, as human nature is so prone to loll, felt an inclination to rest his arm upon the high mantelshelf.

He smiled a quiet smile of self-satisfaction as he glanced at the shelf and noticed the impression left in the dust where an arm had recently rested. It was a high shelf, too, and the impression in the dust was that of an elbow only. The man had stood with his chin in his hand and his elbow on the shelf.

Darrent was a well-proportioned man and tried the position. It was not one of comfort—for case he would have laid his whole arm full length upon the shelf, and rested his shoulder against it. The man who had stood there was taller than he, and close upon, if not over, six feet in height. So far, he thought, so good. The search was narrowing.

Surely to trace a man of six feet in that little town would not be difficult. He wondered how tall young Marsden was, then setting to work again, dropped on his knees and carefully examined the fireplace.

No papers had been burnt, only the dead ashes remained on the hearth, and something he had almost overlooked, but now caught up with an excited exclamation, and carried to the window.

A plug of half-burnt tobacco that had been cut out of a pipe, because it had been rammed in too tightly, and discarded. Dug out with the blade of a knife, it was obvious, for a dainty shred of meerschaum adhered to the side.

Another step—another clue. The murderer was not a tramp who had beguiled the old man to let him stay the night. Tramps were not so wasteful of their tobacco, and did not smoke meerschaums.

Six feet high—smoked a meerschaum pipe. Darrent felt he was moving.

A quarter of an hour afterwards when the junior constable returned to the Grange, he found Herbert Darrent sitting in the library writing at topmost speed in his note-book, with a fragment of thread, a plug of tobacco, a scrap of ivory, a carved ivory chessman, and a few matches spread out on a sheet of paper before him.

"Have you discovered anything, sir?" he ventured to ask as Darrent continued to fill sheet after sheet as if unaware of his presence.

Darrent quietly nodded his head and closed the book.

"Listen to me," he said, "and tell me if you know anyone who answers to this description: Appearance, very tall—say a good six feet and broad in proportion, bronzed and bearded, strong as an ox. Temper very passionate. Dress of homespun cloth, soft hat, smokes a meerschaum pipe. Lately returned from somewhere abroad, probably South Africa."

Thompson, with his eyes wide open, gazed in astonishment at the detective, and shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

"He wears a heavy gold signet ring on the little finger of the left hand, and has recently cut the forefinger of the right. Do you know him?"

"No, indeed, sir, you've made a mistake. He wouldn't do it. He couldn't."

"Ah! then my description fits someone."

"It is Astray Marsden to the life, sir, but he didn't commit the murder."

"That is to be proved. He was at this house on the night of the murder. You met him on that night."

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you, Thompson. You've got to do your duty, whether it is palatable to you or not. Astray Marsden left the town nearly two years ago, came back here the night of the murder and left next morning. If you did not meet him that night you would not know he answered to my description. A man does not look the same, and certainly does not dress the same, after an absence abroad of two years. When did you meet him?"

"Near the Nine Bells."

"What time?"

"A little after two o'clock in the morning."

"Was it snowing?"

"No, sir, it had stopped."

"What did he say? Did he seem excited?"

"He was rather, sir. He said that he'd come back to try and be friends with old Marsden, but no one could be, and he was off again."

"Very well, then one thing is certain, and that is that Astray Marsden was in this room on the night of the murder. It will rest for him to clear himself, or for the law to bring the charge home to him. Marsden himself opened the door, and the two men entered this room. Marsden sat in his chair there, the chess-board was on that small table beside him, and he was undoubtedly working out a problem when he was interrupted. It needs only a glance at the bookcases to show his hobby. Old Marsden sat there, the board beside him—the young man stood here." Darrent took up his position by the fender again. "His elbow upon the mantelpiece—so—you can see where the elbow rested. He must be a tall man who stands so, Thompson, that gave me an idea as to his height, this thread of wool, the texture of his clothes. He smoked as he talked—smoked a coarse-cut ship's tobacco, cavendish, not the sort that a man of his breeding would smoke unless he had been down in the world. Knocking about from one country to another, and therefore bronzed, and as a man does not take particular care of his appearance at such times, and certainly does not give ten minutes every day to shaving, bearded. You see, Thompson, things are very clear, when we look carefully."

"Yes, sir," the constable mechanically replied, gazing at Darrent bewildered.

"The young man stood here and they talked, perhaps young Marsden wanted money, they generally do, and the old man refused—taunted him—you know old men can taunt, Thompson—the words got higher and higher, the young man's temper hotter and hotter, and then he launched into a furious outburst, emphasising each point by bringing his fist down upon the oak mantelshelf. Three times he did that, Thompson, you see, three marks made by the concussion as his ring struck the wood. The strength in that blow would kill a man, so be careful if you ever have to deal with young Marsden. The old man was frightened and faint, and over-turned the board with the pieces upon it as he started to his feet, and Astray gave him some brandy in that little glass from the decanter on the sideboard. As he handed it to him he placed his hand upon the mantelshelf, this time the right hand, you see by the impression the forefinger was bound up. Dust is a very valuable thing, Thompson, don't forget that. Then young Marsden collected the chess men and placed them in the box again.

"The old man might have done that," Thompson exclaimed, anxious to test the skill with which the puzzle was being put together.

"The young man did it, Thompson; one had rolled under the sideboard; old Marsden would never have shut up the box and put it away with one missing. The chess men are put away, the old man becomes more amiable, and they sit down again. He goes so far as to offer young Marsden a cigar; you see one has been taken from this box, a new box which young Marsden opened with his clasp knife; you know the nasty kind of knife, Thompson; the murder was committed with the same weapon. He opens the box, takes out a cigar and lights it, then puts the knife here by his side, and sits on the edge of the table.

"Again they talk; again the old man taunts, and again the young man loses his temper and crashes his hand down upon the table, his fingers touch that awful knife, and in a second it is over. For a moment he is paralysed with fear, and, rushing to the sideboard, pours out a glass of the brandy, for himself this time, spilling it upon the woodwork and the carpet, and then stands and hesitates. He dare not leave by the front door in case he is seen; suddenly he remembers the passage through the rockery on to the river; no doubt the water at the bottom of the tunnel would be frozen, and he could escape that way. With one glance over his shoulder he leaves the library, rushes across the hall through the opposite room and the conservatory, then out into the grounds along the covered walk, and by the tunnel on to the frozen river.

"Old Marsden, left for dead, comes slowly back to semi-consciousness. He is dying, and he knows it, but he swears the guilty shall not escape, and even with his failing strength he will denounce the murderer."

Darrent finished his dramatic word picture, and then taking the slip of paper from his pocket, held it before the face of his comrade.

"I am dying, murdered by Astray," gasped Thompson.

"And Astray has bolted," Darrent interrupted.

Thompson could only stolidly nod in acquiescence. Loth as he was to believe that Astray Marsden, whom he remembered in years back always had a kindly word for everyone, was a murderer, he had been led away by Darrent's dramatic recital, and the paper written by the dying man seemed to clinch the matter. Yes, there could be no question about it now. Astray must have done it.

"It looks rather black against young Marsden," he said, at last finding his tongue.

"You suspect him?"

Thompson nodded moodily.

"Well, look here, Thompson," suddenly snapped Darrent. "Don't you be in such a confounded hurry to jump at conclusions. Now, if we find presently that Astray Marsden can prove an absolute *alibi*, what becomes of these deductions, eh? Astray Marsden is not the only man in the world who stands six feet high, wears a rough homespun suit, carries a Norwegian knife, and likes to have his signet-ring on the little finger of his left hand."

"But the paper?"

"Well, what of that? 'I am dying, murdered by

A Christmas pudding is given away with every copy of SHORT STORIES Double Number. Of course, it is but a printed pudding, but the person who carves it up and puts it together correctly in another form will receive a cheque.

Astra——' The 'y' is missing, and you jump to the conclusion it must be Astray. Now suppose, Thompson, that the mystery has a deeper root, that it concerns Astray all the same, but not as a murderer. Suppose old Marsden intended, for example, to write 'Murdered by Astray's brother,' or any other relation, and died before he could write the last word. What becomes of your evidence then?"

And having calmly and deliberately demolished the structure that he had so carefully and elaborately constructed, Darrent took a cigarette from his case, and lighting it, strolled over to the window.

"I told you," he said between the whiffs, "that the man stood with his elbow on the mantelshelf, well, so he did, that's obvious, and then I showed you three dents that looked comparatively fresh, and I said that they had been made by the ring on the little finger of the man's hand. Well, perhaps they were, and perhaps they were done weeks ago, by old Marsden himself; perhaps the man's elbow never rested on the shelf, but old Marsden had put something there, and afterwards removed it. I shouldn't like to swear to any of it. I've put a lot of little things together, but they may be all wrong, every one of them. What do you think, eh?"

"I think they all fit too well."

"They fit well enough, but they *prove* nothing, absolutely nothing. To be a successful detective one must be ready not only to forge chains, but to set to work directly afterwards and break them, if they can be broken, test every link, and if there's a flaw find it. One must not persuade himself that because a few circumstances fit, that that, and that only, must be the truth. Why, I have made many as good a chain of circumstantial evidence before, and every link has been faulty; the whole thing worse than worthless."

"But Mr. Darrent, the papers say that you are——"

"The English Lecoq—precisely; but I am very much afraid that their knowledge of Monsieur Lecoq has only been derived from French sensational novels, according to which he never erred—was absolutely infallible. I think Monsieur Lecoq himself would tell a very different story. We have followed one set of circumstances closely and, well, with the result that it brands Astray Marsden as the murderer. Very well; now we'll forget all about that and go on an entirely different track. What is the mystery connected with the set of Indian chessmen? Let us look at this question a little.

"(1) Why have they been stolen, and by whom?

"(2) If Astray murdered old Marsden to obtain any secret connected with the chessmen, why did he leave them behind?

"(3) If Astray murdered old Marsden and only discovered afterwards the hidden value of the chessmen, where is the motive for the murder?

"(4) If Astray did not commit the murder, who did?

"Once find the secret of the chessmen and you'll find the murderer. Now what have we got as our clues? The one piece here, a pawn, missing from the set—there cannot be many sets like this one, Thompson—and a chip from another piece.—Still, we cannot go into everybody's house and examine their curiosities and *bric-à-brac*, to discover if they have the set we are in search of. Now clue the second is more valuable, and that is the knife; you see it is of an ordinary Norwegian pattern with a spring blade, but the letter 'A' is branded into the yellow wood of the handle. Find to whom it belongs; if 'A' means Astray; if young Marsden ever owned this knife, and we shall be nearer the hand that struck the blow. Now, then, Thompson, who do you think committed the murder?"

"Well, I don't know, sir; the way you put it it might be anyone."

"So it might," Darrent replied, "it might be anyone, and perhaps we haven't got within a thousand miles of the right one yet, still I've done all I can till I get news from London, and I'm going for a skate on the river. I'm not a sleuth-hound longing for blood, but I've been longing to get on that stretch of ice ever since I've been in Norcombe."

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING CLOSER.

HERBERT DARRENT spoke the truth when he said that he did not belong to the sleuth-hound type of detectives, he was too thoroughly English to take a morbid delight in mere man hunting, his profession notwithstanding; but he possessed sufficient sound common sense to make use of some especially cute and discerning faculties that nature had endowed him with, and was generally admitted to be one of the very smartest young men that Scotland Yard had ever been proud to possess.

If there seemed absolutely no clue, the cry was: "Send Darrent," and if Darrent gave it up, it was hopeless. Although the last man in the world to neglect duty for pleasure, he took a keen delight in all English sports and pastimes, and could handle a bat or a cue and pull an oar with the best.

He had mentally decided that the very first step in this investigation must be to trace Astray Marsden, and as no further progress could be made until he got his reply from headquarters, he decided to take an hour's spin upon the river; an hour on that perfect stretch of ice, and then he would be back in time to drive over and catch the express from Barnstaple to London if required at Scotland Yard.

It was simply glorious to glide along at racing speed over miles of smooth black ice, but rather annoying to Darrent, who counted himself a good skater as Englishmen go, to find that he could never overtake a man who kept steadily on some forty yards in front of him, sometimes letting him decrease the distance that separated them to only a few feet, and then suddenly sweeping a quarter of a mile ahead. Darrent felt decidedly piqued as for the fourth time the stranger spurted double his pace, and easily left him behind, but, at last, apparently contented with the exhibition he had given of his prowess, the man curved round, and came bearing down upon him.

"By Gosh!" he ejaculated, as he manœuvred to Darrent's side by a series of complicated twists and curves. "Gosh, stranger, I guess you skate a bit, eh?"

Darrent acknowledged the brusque compliment by a shake of the head, and replied:

"I tried my level best, but I could not get near you."

"Well, I calculate I'm fast. Spent a few years on the other side of the big spit."

"I beg your pardon?"

"In the States."

"Oh."

"And in Canada, the country that's crying to be joined to the Star Spangled Banner."

"Oh, yes."

"And I calculate it will be."

"Indeed."

"Wal, yes, I guess."

Darrent had never heard such a rapid flow of cheap

English-Americanisms in his life, and gazed with some curiosity at his companion as side by side they sped along towards Norcombe.

"It's a great country, sir, the States."

"Yes, so I've always understood from Americans."

"Ah, [illegible] it's tall, sir, I should say."

"You seem much impressed by it."

"Why, certainly. I reckon, sir, I should be proud to be a citizen of one of the big cities of the U.S.A."

"I thought you were."

"No, sir, but I have lived so long in the States, and I admire the people so much that I have unconciously fallen into their tongue."

Darrent gazed at his companion again, his curiosity giving place to amusement. In the course of his detective duties, he had more than once had the necessity of crossing to New York, but never had he heard so much Yankee slang from one man in the whole course of his life, and he at once summed up the stranger as an amusing idiot who had never been within a thousand miles of Sandy Hook, and was simply "America mad."

"Slick bit of ice this, eh?"

"Very good."

The next remark from the stranger surprised and nettled Darrent.

"Calculate you're a 'tec from London, eh? On the scent—sort of bloodhound."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You needn't, I saw you pottering round the Grange this morning, examining footpaths and finger marks. I kind of reckon I'm a bit cute. Just a little. Spotted your man yet?"

"Eh?"

"The man who helped old Marsden to collect his chips and hand 'em in."

"Oh no, not yet."

"Now I guessed you'd lay hold of him in about a brace of shakes."

"Indeed."

"Touching young Marsden, eh? What price that?"

"I'm afraid I don't exactly follow you."

"No? Well, I calculate not, I'm a bit cute, sir, I am," and the Anglo-American maniac tapped the side of his nose with a long fore-finger bound round with court plaster.

"Find if young Marsden's returned. Ah, not that I'm over sorry old Marsden's pegged it—of course I didn't want him murdered, but I calculate I might stand to be a bit better off in a week or two."

"Really, how so?"

"Wal, you see he never recognised me, but I'm a cousin, sir, and I reckon I'll shake things up a bit presently. There are one or two others in this neighbourhood, sir, and you bet we shall contest the will."

"That is, if it's not satisfactory to your ideas, I presume?"

"Precisely, I should smile. What's the law, now, stranger, if that old miser, Marsden, has left all his dust to the youngster; and it's proved that the youngster murdered him? What's the law?"

"Don't you think, Mr.——"

"Silas Gosnell, stranger, Silas Gosnell."

"Well, don't you think, Mr. Gosnell, it would be much wiser to wait until young Mr. Marsden is accused before you make quite so much use of his name in connection with the murder?"

"Wal, p'raps you're right; but what's the law, anyway?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Darrent responded sharply, as they made for the bank on the Norcombe side.

"All right, steady does it. Don't get hot, young man," Mr. Gosnell observed, as he unfastened his skates. "Still, I guess a Yankee 'tec would know the law backwards."

"Very probably so, Mr Gosnell," replied Darrent. "He would know it, as you say, backwards."

"Are you strolling my way, stranger?"

"I think not; and yet, on second thoughts, I think I will."

"Right. Will you poison yourself?"

"No, thanks."

"Sure?"

"No, thanks."

"Wall, I guess you're right; poison yourself is no figure of speech if you drink the stuff they sell in Norcombe."

Herbert Darrent walked with his strange acquaintance through the village, anxious to gain what news he could, if any, of the relatives of the late Josiah Marsden, and before they parted at the door of the Nine Bells he had learnt that Marsden's remaining cousins were Andrew Marsden, a farmer, living a few miles to the west of Norcombe, and Arthur Ridgeway, the manager of a theatre in Barnstaple.

As to Mr. Silas Gosnell, who appeared to be the only other relation, Darrent had reckoned him up as a colossal fraud and an individual who, for some reason or other of his own—perhaps only a love of bounce—wished to pretend that he had spent years of his life in a country that he had evidently never seen, for a cautious questioning in regard to several of the chief cities of America that Darrent had visited, proved conclusively that Mr. Gosnell knew nothing of what he was talking, while his rapid flow of florid Americanisms, heard nowhere on that Continent, although, doubtless, very impressive to the good folks of Norcombe, certainly showed that his sole knowledge of the style of language on the other side of the Atlantic, had been derived from the Yankee jokes in the English comic papers.

Silas Gosnell was a man that Darrent felt he would very much like to study, but time would not permit. He could only label him as a harmless idiot, and then forget him, although he did ask himself once or twice during the day, as the thought recurred to him, why Gosnell's insanity had taken such a peculiar turn.

After bidding good-bye to his companion, Darrent walked down to the police-station, but there was no reply to his wire, and it was not until noon next day that he received a lengthy telegram from London in answer to his own.

Thanks to his promptitude of action, the authorities at Scotland Yard had experienced little difficulty in tracing Astray Marsden. He had gone by the first train from Barnstaple to Waterloo, as Darrent had expected he would; had taken a cab at the station, and was driven to the Royal Hotel on the Embankment, where he was now staying under his own name.

"Hum!" muttered Darrent, as he read the message, "Got a good *alibi*, I suppose." He glanced at his watch; he could drive over and catch the afternoon train from Barnstaple, get up to London, see young Marsden, and be back again the next night; and while at Barnstaple he might be able to have a few words with one of the other cousins, Arthur Ridgeway.

A couple of hours later Darrent was strolling down the High Street of Barnstaple, looking for the Regency Theatre, which, after a lengthy search, he discovered in a not very lively quarter of the town, and from a variegated placard on the wall gleaned the information that Mr. Arthur Ridgeway was the actor-manager. Another highly-coloured poster representing a gentleman in a deep blue frock coat and pink trousers, with an unaccountably amiable smile upon his features, being dropped into an enormous cauldron of some steaming liquid by another and less amiable gentleman, who, in pleasing contrast to his unfortunate victim, was attired in a pink frock coat and blue trousers, announced to all and sundry, that there would be played that evening, and for the rest of the week the stirring melodrama, entitled: *The Factory Man's Revenge*, in which was introduced a scene from Woolwich Arsenal, with a real steam hammer weighing one hundred tons and a real cauldron of real molten metal. "The most thrilling scene," the poster asserted, "ever seen on any stage," which Darrent was quite ready to believe.

Making his way down a grimy court, at the entrance of which a lamp in a wire cage bore the legend "Stage door," Darrent found a veritable picture gallery of double-crown bills, representing the villain, always in the same pink coat and the same blue trousers, putting the gentleman, whose taste in clothes was exactly *vice versâ*, through a variety of original and excruciating tortures, at which the bland gentleman continued to beam and smile, evidently with an inborn knowledge that his turn was coming in the last act.

At last Darrent reached the stage door of the Regency Theatre, and, sending in his card, asked to see Mr. Ridgeway, and while waiting whiled away the time by studying a pictorial representation of the great scene of the last act, which explained the much-put-upon gentleman's extreme forbearance in the previous scenes.

Darrent's admiration of the triumph of virtue over villainy was interrupted by the return of the stage door-keeper. Mr. Ridgeway would see him, he was informed,

The Imperial Naval and Military Album is the greatest work of art of the year. It is published in shilling parts, which appear on the 15th of every month.

and following his guide along a tortuous labyrinth of stairs and passages, he at last found himself upon the stage of the Regency Theatre, where the flaring "T" piece only served to render the gloom of the auditorium visible. A good-tempered looking man nodded to him as he appeared, and begging to be excused for a moment, continued the task upon which he was engaged, of holding the hundred-ton hammer erect while a man went over it with a paint brush.

"Glad to see you; sit down, sir," he shouted, as Darrent appeared. "Not in a hurry for a minute? Thanks. Awfully busy; give you ten minutes, in ten minutes. Suit you? Right, they're yours. Now give me your opinion, there's a good chap," he rattled on, "does that steamhammer look like the real thing, or does it not? Ha, you're laughing. Never mind, you haven't got the right light on it. Come to-night and see it, and you'd swear it was the genuine article. One hundred tons. Daylight doesn't suit any of us. Now look at me, what do I look, forty, eh? See me to-night. I'm the hero, twenty-five, and lovely as the rising sun. Look at the heroine. Ah, she's a pretty girl anyway, isn't she? But she'll look a goddess, a perfect goddess of twenty-one to-night. As it is she's——"

"Now, Arthur, don't tell any stories," a very pretty girl standing by the manager exclaimed, putting her hand over his mouth. "He's always talking nonsense," she continued, in an explanatory way to Herbert Darrent.

"My wife, sir," Ridgeway continued, releasing the hundred-ton hammer, which descended with a dead wooden thud, and putting his arm round the girl—"one of the best—one of the very best, and the prettiest little heroine on the stage."

Darrent shook hands with the lady, and paid her an easy little compliment that raised her colour, and caused her husband to beam upon them both.

"Look at that, sir, look at it!" he exclaimed delightedly; "there's a lovely little innocent blush for you! And yet you'll find people who say a woman forgets how to blush directly she goes on the stage. Gad, sir, they ought to be horsewhipped, and I'd like to have the doing of it! Now, excuse me just one minute more—must go through a little scene, and then I'm yours. By-the-way," he continued anxiously, "you don't want to go on the stage, do you? Don't say you do—shouldn't like to refuse you. I like the look of you, but I'm full—full up."

Darrent shook his head laughingly, and the manager, much relieved, bustled across the stage and rushed into rehearsal of the little scene.

"A jolly, good-hearted little chap," was the way Herbert Darrent summed up the second relation of Josiah Marsden, and fell into a reverie about the first relation he had met, and why Nature had ever found it worth her while to create such a colossal idiot. Or, the idea always came to him, was the man as big a fool as he pretended to be, or something more of a rogue?

His ruminations were interrupted, and he was brought back to the world again, by finding Mr. Ridgeway standing before him, wildly brushing his hand through his hair, and looking the very picture of farcical despair.

"Behold her—behold her," the manager excitedly shouted, waving his hand towards his wife, "what does she look like?"

Darrent thought to himself that she looked like what she was, a very bright English girl, but he was not even given time to express his opinion.

"Does she look broken-hearted, and starving? Not a bit, not a bit like it. I've gone through this scene dozens of times and she *won't* look miserable; I don't believe she can, bless her heart."

"Go on, go on, enter James Hardy—he's the villain of the piece," he explained to Darrent. "Squire Hardy, in love with the village maiden, good old crusted melodrama, but won't it go? Won't the public hoot him? Ah," and the energetic manager rushed across the stage again. "It won't do, I tell you, you say 'You're in my power!' as if you were a king the time the next train started for Bideford. Put some life into it. Now then, my dear, shrink from him; I know he's a jolly good chap, but that's not his character in the play. That's better; no, wait a minute; 'You're in my power,' yes, that's all right, shrink, and then do a little shriek. Now go back. 'If I could see him once more I could die content,' that's right, enter Hardy, cue 'in my power,' good. Shriek, 'I am lost, who will save me?' Ah, very good, I enter, struggle. Yes, that's all right, now do it like that to-night."

The little scene was evidently settled to Mr. Ridgeway's satisfaction, and he walked over to Herbert Darrent. "Now, sir, I am yours to command."

The detective, over a quick judge of character, had long since arrived at the conclusion that the best way to deal with Mr. Ridgeway was to come to the point at once, and having taken a seat in that gentleman's room, and accepted a glass of wine that was generously pressed upon him, he placed his hand in his pocket, and taking out the spring knife laid it upon the table.

"I am not going to attempt to deceive you, Mr. Ridgeway," he exclaimed. "I tell you frankly I am a detective, inquiring into the murder of your cousin, Josiah Marsden."

The manager, with his eyes riveted upon the knife, nodded his head, but said nothing.

"When did you see Josiah Marsden last?"

"Two years ago, when he foreclosed on his mortgage on this theatre, and turned me into the streets almost ruined. I was the proprietor then, now I'm only the manager," Ridgeway replied, with suppressed passion in his voice. "Never seen him since then, and always prayed I never would—in case of accidents."

"Ah. Have you ever seen that knife before?"

Ridgeway caught his breath.

"Marsden was murdered with that knife, do you remember ever seeing it before?"

"Never," the manager replied, turning his gaze from the knife to his own boots, and nervously fingering the stem of his wine-glass. "Never, that I am absolutely certain of."

"A good-hearted chap," was Darrent's mental note, as he observed the obvious embarrassment of the man. "He's not used to telling lies, but it's no use."

"Seen Astray Marsden lately?" he interjected.

"No."

"He's abroad, is he not?"

"So they say."

"Ah!"

"Good Heavens, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Ridgeway, jumping to his feet. "You don't mean to say you suspect him? It's impossible. He wouldn't do it, I'd stake my right hand on it. He's a trump, as white a man as was ever made."

"And so is his friend, Arthur Ridgeway," Darrent interposed, slapping him on the back. "There, don't disturb yourself. If he's innocent, he'll be able to prove it right enough," and wringing the man's hand, Herbert Darrent strolled out of the theatre and towards the railway station.

"Arthur Ridgeway recognises the knife, and knows that Astray Marsden has returned," he muses, "very well, things are getting closer. Now to see whether young Marsden is worthy of this man's good opinion, or is one of the biggest scoundrels breathing."

CHAPTER V.

DARRENT MAKES AN ARREST.

If Herbert Darrent possessed one fault more than another, it was that of being a little too self-confident.

In the profession that he had chosen to adopt, and of which he was decidedly proud, he had been phenomenally successful, partly owing to his own perceptive faculties, and partly, he owned it himself, to good luck.

Although he was always ready to regard his clues from different points of view, and test them well before he took decisive action, those cases that he had woven out of a single thread, in the past, had always proved his deductions to be so correct and well-founded that, being still a young man, he was sometimes inclined to be led away by ideas of his own infallibility. He was invariably cautious, uniformly prudent, and generally right.

What a comfortable feeling for a man, until one day the awakening comes, and comes a little rudely.

In order that the constable Thompson should gain no real inkling of the direction in which his thoughts were tending, he had that morning proved to him conclusively that the murderer could be none other than Astray Marsden, and then just as clearly, a few minutes later, that he very probably was not; and now he smiled, a quiet smile of amused self-satisfaction at the perplexity into which he had thrown that worthy officer of the law. It was a harmless conceit—a little joke of Darrent's own, that he had frequently indulged in to the amazement of many whom he had chanced to meet.

The building up of the most damning evidence from the very slenderest of clues, and then, presto! the demolition of the whole thing, the crumbling away of the entire fabric as he placed a different interpretation upon each piece of evidence, and the whole thing faded into less than nothing.

A harmless sport enough this, in itself, but a dangerous game when the stake was life or death.

The detective was the only occupant of a carriage of the London express, and comfortably ensconced in a corner was reading over the notes that he had made in regard to the case, and now and again glancing at one or other of the relics of the murder, as he wished to confirm a point, whistling through his teeth the while a chorus from the latest comic opera.

It was not that Herbert Darrent was in himself callous of death, or of murder, but when one's daily life is given to the constant handling of relics of crime they cease to be objects of awe, they lose their gruesome associations, and simply become clues that shall assist the chase.

The stained knife with which the deed was committed would doubtless freeze the blood of any favoured visitor when it was added to the collection of criminal weapons in the Black Museum, but to Darrent it only formed one important item in the complicated puzzle that he was putting together. He put it together piece by piece; it seemed to him to fit too easily. Everything pointed too much in one direction. What to an ordinarily constituted mind would have looked so exceedingly simple, became to Darrent all the more difficult because of that very simplicity.

Every bit of evidence that he had collected pointed directly to Astray Marsden as the murderer. There was no getting away from it, for already the knife had been recognised, Astray was condemned by every circumstance, and, more strongly than all, by the letter of the murdered man—the stained and crumpled letter that Robson had tried to conceal.

Darrent could hardly keep from half wishing that old Marsden had not left the paper. He felt a little annoyed that what promised to be a big mystery, upon which he could exercise his talents, should turn out to be none, and that he, the English Lecoq, should be sent down to discover the murderer—to trace him inch by inch—when a casual acquaintance on the ice had told him at once who had done the deed, and a dunderheaded fraud of a country policeman had tried to conceal the actual paper that accused the murderer.

To a clever detective who had hoped for a tangled skein to unravel, which would add yet another laurel to the many which he wore, it was annoying, and when Darrent arrived at Waterloo and took a cab to headquarters, he was not in the very best frame of mind, and really regarded himself as a little ill-used.

At ten o'clock next morning Herbert Darrent alighted from a hansom at the corner of Wellington Street, and walked down towards the Embankment.

"Sweeper, sir."

The detective halted and slowly took off his glove.

"It's all right, sir," the sweeper rapidly continued in an undertone, "he's still there. Theatre last night—not out since," and he accepted with becoming humility the coin which Darrent dropped, at a respectful distance, into a very dirty palm.

"Send my card up to Mr. Marsden," was Darrent's instruction to the hall porter at the Royal Hotel, "and say that I must see him at once on important African business."

Astray Marsden, who sat idling over his breakfast and skimming the morning paper, glanced at the card, which the smart page boy brought him, and listened to the message: "'The Honourable Rupert Grey,' hum, don't know the name, and I'm not used to calls from honourables—very well—show the gentleman up."

"The Honourable Rupert Grey," he repeated, "well, it doesn't matter after all, I suppose I shall soon learn his business—bought a claim out there, perhaps, but how in the world does he know me, or that I'm staying here?"

Rising from the table, he stood by the fire, with his elbow on the mantelpiece, and his chin resting in his hand awaiting the arrival of his visitor.

Astray Marsden was a fine, well-built, and tolerably good-looking young Englishman, with the figure of a Hercules, but Dame Nature, in one of the many tricks she is so fond of playing upon her children, had given him an utterly weak disposition, which was betrayed by a glance at his face. A form of strength, a mind of weakness—a good fellow but no backbone, ever ready to procrastinate, never ready to act. He was a man people would turn and look back on in the streets, as he towered above the passers-by. The embodiment of strength without, they could not know how weak and vacillating he was within. He was simply the outcome of one of Nature's little humours that prevent monotony in the human race.

Herbert Darrent could scarcely repress a start as he entered the room—Astray Marsden was as he had himself described—as he had pictured him to the life—even to the position in which he stood, the very position that the detective had conjured up as he stood in the library at the Grange.

It was only another proof of the wonderful accuracy of his deductions. It really seemed that the man had posed to complete the case which the detective from such tiny clues had woven so skilfully around him.

"The Honourable Rupert Grey?" said Astray interrogatively.

Darrent shrugged his shoulders, and taking the card from Astray's hand quietly tossed it behind the fire as he replied: "Herbert Darrent, of Scotland Yard. One is obliged to use an *alias* sometimes. The enemies of the force usually do, so we're level on that."

The effect of his words certainly surprised Darrent, used as he was to surprises under similar situations, for the man seemed to utterly collapse before his eyes, and fell back into a chair by the fireside the very picture of abject terror and despair.

"Herbert Darrent, the detective?" Astray gasped.

Darrent nodded his head.

"You have come to arrest me?"

Again the detective nodded. He felt a bit perplexed. This was different from any of his previous captures, where the criminal had either lied or shown fight and attempted to escape.

"For the murder of my guardian, Josiah Marsden, eh?" Astray continued, his tongue wetting his parched lips.

"Yes, for the murder of Josiah Marsden on January 12th, at the Grange, Norcombe, Devonshire, and I warn you ——"

"I know what you warn me," the other gasped, "that whatever I may say may be taken down and used in evidence against me. Then use it; I am innocent, I swear it. I've been expecting you ever since I've been here, and now the worst has happened, and I shall be hanged—hanged, because I can't clear myself, like many another poor wretch has been, because Fate was against him. Yes, I shall be hanged, because a man in his hatred of me condemned me to death, and then went with the Devil's own sin upon his soul to face eternity. He hated me—he

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always hated me. When I left him that night he cursed me, and as he died he conceived the vilest, most villainous lie."

"You had better tell this to your counsel."

"I want no counsel. The rope is round my neck already." He put his finger up and loosened his collar, as though he already felt the clinging grip of the hemp. "I can't escape when he himself condemned me."

"Shall I order a cab?"

"Why order a cab? Why not handcuff me and drag me through the streets? Let the world see an innocent man who will be done to death to satisfy the law—the bloodhounds of the law—who yelp for vengeance, who must hang someone, because public sentiment shrieks for a victim."

Darrent shrugged his shoulders. He was beginning to feel more at home now that Astray had launched out into this tirade. He had been called a bloodhound so often by criminals he had traced and captured, that it sounded almost like a confession of guilt.

"You're not condemned yet," he coldly answered. "You're only arrested on suspicion. If you can prove an *alibi*——"

"I can't! You know I can't."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Look here, I'll tell you all."

"I strongly advise you, for your own sake, to wait until you're calmer," Darrent observed, pausing in the work of jotting down in a very prosaic way Astray's rambling statements.

"I mean to tell you all that happened that night, and you can do what you choose with it, and bring me to the scaffold if you like."

"My dear sir, you are talking wildly, the law has no desire to bring you to the scaffold if you're innocent."

"I swear I am!"

"Then if you are, and can put me on the track of the guilty party so much the better," Darrent replied, seating himself and preparing to listen to the weak story of defence, which he was sure would only be like many others that he had so often heard.

"On the night of the 10th of January, just a week ago, I returned to London from South Africa."

"And travelled to Barnstaple by the three o'clock train from Waterloo next day," Darrent interjected.

"Yes, I hadn't seen my guardian for two years; when I left him, in 1894, it was after a serious quarrel. He wanted me to marry one girl, and I wouldn't because I loved another," Astray continued, with a stronger look in his face than he had worn throughout the interview.

"Well?"

"I returned to the Grange, and he welcomed me."

"You entered the library, and stood on the left-hand side of the fireplace, like you were standing when I came into the room, with your elbow resting on the mantelpiece," Darrent continued, "and then you quarrelled about the lady again. Your uncle asked you if you had outgrown your mad infatuation, and you answered 'No.' Then he asked: 'Will you marry the wife I have chosen for you?' and you said: 'No! No! No!' and emphasised each word by a blow of your fist on the mantelshelf?"

Astray glared at Darrent in astonishment. "How do you know?" he asked.

"Because I'm a bloodhound of the law," Darrent replied, sneering in his excitement. "Then you both got more and more heated in the discussion, and, at last, the old man, overwrought with excitement, became faint, and asked you to reach him some brandy from the sideboard, and you did so."

"Yes, that's right."

"Presently he grew calmer, and you settled down and talked of other things."

"Yes, of my travels."

"He became interested, and asked you to tell him more; you drew up your chair opposite him, and lighted your pipe—a meerchaum."

"Yes."

"It wouldn't draw; you took out your knife, and cleared the dry, hard tobacco away from the bottom of the bowl, refilled it, and tried again, but the stem was choked; old Marsden offered you a cigar. You got out a box, a fresh and unopened box, from the sideboard, and prized it open with your knife, a Norwegian knife—this one;" and Darrent suddenly displayed the knife, with the letter "A" burnt into it, before Astray's eyes.

"Yes, it's true; that's it."

"I know it's true; I know this is the knife, and that this knife killed old Marsden."

"Go on, hang me—you mean to!"

"You quarrelled again—old men always get back to the same topic, and he brought you back—you got angry, lost all control of your temper, and——" Darrent shrugged his shoulders.

"And left. I swear it. I left in a rage, turned the wrong way by mistake——"

"And you know the country by heart."

"I was blind with rage. I did not know where I was walking. I walked for miles, then the snow came down and I took shelter in a shed, and when the storm was over went back to the village inn."

"At a quarter-past two. Next day Dobson called and showed you the paper. You said 'you would see him later,' and then you fled."

"Yes, that's true. At first I meant to come to some arrangement with him; it looked as if he held my life in his hands, but afterwards I grew frightened and came to London. You're only just in time, I was going back to the Cape to-morrow."

"You would not have reached Southampton."

"You mean I have been watched?"

"Certainly, every step, every movement. Was running away the act of an innocent man?"

"I was dazed when Dobson showed me the paper. It took all the life out of me. It doomed me to death. There, in Marsden's own hand-writing, was my condemnation, and so all my courage vanished as soon as he had gone, and I sought refuge in flight."

"Without even bidding farewell to the girl you had promised to marry."

"I felt I should be pursued—I dared not go to Bideford—London was my only chance; and then, if I could escape, Africa. What more can I say?"

"You have said too much already, Mr. Marsden," the detective answered quietly, as he made a note that Astray's *fiancée* lived at Bideford. "You should have reserved this statement for your counsel. For the present you must consider yourself under arrest. I think we may as well be going."

In an hour the "Arrest of the Norcombe murderer" was placarded throughout the length and breadth of London. The halfpenny papers came out with flaring bills, special editions, and sensational head-lines.

Herbert Darrent's name was on everyone's lips. The English Lecoq had scored another triumph, and every evening newspaper lauded him to the skies. It was nothing less than their duty to praise one who, at a time of stagnation, when there was absolutely no news to help the sale of the papers, had placed columns of cheap sensation within their grasp.

Never had a crime, in an out-of-the-way part of England received so much publicity. For weeks the excitement was maintained at fever heat and fed by descriptive and imaginative reports.

The preliminary Police Court proceedings, filled more columns. The great trial was given verbatim day after day, and all the while louder and louder swelled the chorus that sung the praises of that prince of all detectives, Herbert Darrent.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATE OF ASTRAY MARSDEN.

FROM the EXETER EXAMINER (evening edition), February 26th, 1896:

THE NORCOMBE MURDER.

LAST DAY OF THE TRIAL.

SUMMING UP.

VERDICT.

Full Description by Our Own Reporter.

9.30 a.m.—The Court is crowded—more crowded, if possible, than it has been for the past two days, for the last act of the drama will be reached to-day, and the verdict of the jury will be given, the verdict that shall condemn Astray Marsden to an awful death, or shall set him free amongst his fellow men.

Never before in the history of the Exeter Assizes have we experienced such a condition of suppressed excitement as that which permeates the Court-house this morning. Cold-blooded, phlegmatic recorders of news as we are by profession, we cannot, try as we will, escape the contagion that pervades the swaying audience awaiting the final act in the great sensational trial.

We, like all others in the building, carried away by the suppressed excitement of the moment, hold our breath, and wait.

Some of the spectators are immersed in the columns of this morning's edition of the EXETER EXAMINER, with our verbatim report of yesterday's proceedings, the eloquent speech of the counsel for the defence, the masterly reply of the counsel for the Crown, while in a prominent seat in the body of the Court, one recognises a well-known London black and white artist, pointing his pencils with particular nicety, as he prepares to limn any striking episode that the day may bring forth.

The minute hand of the clock slowly travels to the hour of ten. One by one counsel enter and take their seats, chatting as idly as though the matter to be tried is not of the gravest import in the whole wide world—life or death. Think of it. Within a few hours the decision will have to be given. Guilty or not guilty. Life or death.

10 o'clock.—Dismally the ten strokes of the Court clock sound, echoed a few seconds later by ten deep notes from the belfry of an adjacent church, and the judge enters the Court, takes his seat, and opens his book.

The large body of junior counsel cease the intellectual operation of pulling quill pens to fragments, the monotonous voice of the usher demands "Silence," and the indescribable murmur inseparable from a body of people overwrought with intense excitement subsides—dies away like the sound of a retreating wave as the water flows down the beach.

Astray Marsden, the prisoner, enters the dock, looking paler and more haggard this morning than ever before, and almost overcome with nervous anxiety grips the rail in front of him, as he faces the crowded court.

Then his eyes wander to a woman closely veiled, sitting at the solicitor's table, where she has sat throughout the whole of the trial, a woman whom it is whispered Astray Marsden has promised to marry, but she has been called as a witness by neither side.

For a single instant, for the first time during the trial, the girl raises her veil, and the prisoner catches a glimpse of a pale but beautiful face. A tremulous smile of encouragement hovers for a moment around her quivering lips, and then the veil is lowered again, and the man braces himself for the final ordeal.

THE SUMMING UP.

10.5.—The Judge commences his summing up. "Gentlemen of the jury," he says, "you have to-day entered upon the last stage of your labours in a case which, to me, has proved at once the most painful and the most obvious in all my experience of criminal trials. It only remains for me, as impartially as lies in my power, to review the whole of the evidence that has been placed before you both in favour of and against the prisoner, Astray Marsden, and to leave it to you to decide upon that evidence, whether he is guilty or not guilty of the crime with which he stands charged — the wilful murder of Josiah Marsden, of the Grange, at Norcombe.

"The evidence that has been placed before you, gentlemen, is, with one exception—but that is a fearful exception—of a purely circumstantial character, and it will be for you to say whether the series of circumstantial facts that have been detailed to you, and which the defence has ingeniously endeavoured to explain away, are sufficient to justify you in returning a verdict of guilty, and by that verdict ridding Society of as cold-blooded a scoundrel as ever breathed, or whether there is sufficient and reasonable doubt in your minds to justify you in giving to the prisoner the benefit of the doubt.

"Gentlemen, let us look at the evidence. On the morning of the 12th of January, Josiah Marsden was discovered in the library of the Grange, at Norcombe, stabbed to death with a Norwegian clasp knife, which weapon you have had produced. There is no dispute that the murder was committed with that knife, and equally the defence does not attempt to deny that up to the very night of the murder that knife was in the possession of Astray Marsden."

THE STAINED PAPER.

"In the hand of Josiah Marsden was found this paper."

The Judge pauses impressively, and takes up the blood-stained paper that has caused such a sensation throughout the trial.

"This paper," he solemnly continues, "was found in the dead man's stiffened fingers. Death had overtaken him before he could frame his thoughts in words, and so his last message is only a broken one. 'I am dying,' he wrote, 'murdered by Astra'—a—s—t—r—a—and his life departed.

"The prosecution has told you that he intended to write 'Astray Marsden,' the defence has been unable to deny it. The prosecution has said he wrote so that justice might be meted out to his murderer; the defence has hinted, only hinted, gentlemen, even they have not dared to do more than whisper, that Josiah Marsden hated his ward or son, and did what he did in revenge! Faced eternity with the foulest sin that man could commit upon his soul. Died with a lie in his heart, that a young man might be hanged. The defence has hinted that this is why the paper was written. I will not venture to express my own opinion of such a method of defence. Let us look at the matter dispassionately. If we are to believe that Josiah Marsden committed this loathsome deed as his last act on earth, and that Astray Marsden did not murder him, then that murder was committed by some unknown enemy of the old man.

"Has the defence been able to hint at any such person? No. Has the defence been able to assume or deduce that any other person was in the house on that night? No. It has simply contented itself with a categorical denial of everything, and a plea as surprising as it is abominable.

"The value of that plea, gentlemen, I leave for you to decide. Let us pass again to the circumstantial evidence and deal first of all with

THE NORWEGIAN KNIFE.

This knife has the letter "A" branded upon its handle. The knife was in the prisoner's possession, it is agreed, until a few moments or a few hours before the murder. It is admitted that Astray Marsden was with Josiah Marsden on the night of the murder, it is also admitted that he used the knife to open a cigar box in the presence of his guardian, and then left it behind him ready for the murderer, who, we are told, entered the house after the prisoner had left it. The value of that plea, gentlemen, is again for you to decide.

"The murder was first discovered by the woman, Margaret Gadsden, who was in the habit of going daily to attend to the domestic requirements of the deceased. On the morning of January 12th she went as usual, and gained admittance at the side entrance by the key she always had in her possession.

Turn to page 397. There you will find particulars of a football competition, the like of which you have never seen before.

"You will recollect that between the night of the 11th and the morning of the 12th, there was a phenomenally heavy fall of snow, and the woman noticed that there were footsteps leading to the front door of the house, but none leading from it.

"Becoming alarmed at the unusual stillness which reigned through the house, and unable to get any answer when she knocked at Josiah Marsden's door, Margaret Gadsden hastened to the police-station and returned with Constable Dobson.

"That man, gentlemen, you have had before you. He has told you himself of his attempt to blind the aims of justice by withholding the most important piece of evidence in this intricate case, the paper that Josiah Marsden left behind him. Dobson has expressed his contrition and regret for the disgraceful course which he took, but whether that contrition will absolve him from the penalties of his action I very much doubt."

CONSTABLE DOBSON TO BE PUNISHED.

"The Treasury will take such steps as are deemed desirable to punish Constable Dobson for his action; an action, gentlemen, that had for its object the defeating of the ends of justice. I cannot refrain from referring to the supreme and utter idiocy manifested throughout by Constable Dobson in relation to this case, and cannot too warmly applaud the indefatigable energy, the zeal and acumen, of Mr. Herbert Darrent, the official who took over the charge of the case, and was fortunately able to retrieve all the errors—I will content myself by calling them errors at present—which Dobson committed prior to his appearance on the scene. Returning to the events of January 12th, you will remember that Dobson and the woman returned together, and upon entering the library found Josiah Marsden lying dead upon the floor, stabbed to the heart. By his side was the paper which has had such an important bearing upon the case, the paper which Dobson retained, showing it only to the prisoner, Astray Marsden. You have heard Dobson's account of that interview—that the prisoner turned pale and trembled, and then promised to see him later in the day.

"It is for you to say whether Dobson is a man whose evidence can be relied upon or not; but setting that upon one side, was the action of Astray Marsden that of an innocent man? He sought refuge in flight. It is urged that he became the prey to a spasm of fear, but an innocent man should have no such cowardly emotion. Why did he not defy the blackmail of Dobson, and knowing his innocence, rest contented on being able to prove an *alibi*? Why? Because, gentlemen, he could not. Because he was bound to admit that he was at the Grange on that night. He owns he was at the Grange, but pleads that he left before the snowstorm, and left Josiah Marsden alive.

"If the defence could prove that fact, could account for the period that elapsed between the prisoner leaving the Grange, and being met by Constable Thompson, there might be some grounds for the plea, but not one single witness has been called to substantiate it, and we are asked to believe that he walked about for hours in a blinding snowstorm. That has been put before you in contradistinction to the theory of the prosecution, that he entered the house after the snowstorm, leaving his footprints up to the door, that the old standing quarrel—which it is admitted on both sides existed—was renewed, and that he left by the secret passage, on to the frozen river, a passage that was known only to those who had lived at the Grange.

"Astray Marsden was met by Constable Thompson soon after two o'clock in the morning of the 12th, in a very excited condition—still chafing, the defence says, under the insults he had had heaped upon him, chafing, gentlemen, after several hours' walk.

"I have reviewed the circumstances that occurred in Norcombe, but it is not upon these events alone that the case stands. Let us turn to London. Herbert Darrent has been before you, and given his evidence with exemplary clearness. He has told you the manner in which he succeeded in tracking Astray Marsden to the Royal Hotel in London, and he has related the story of

THE ARREST.

"The first words of the prisoner when Darrent entered the room were: 'You have come to arrest me,' and though warned not to commit himself, he then launched into a heated attack against the murdered man, an attack which foreshadowed the line of defence which has been adopted, that of revenge. He charged Josiah Marsden with leaving such a message for the sole purpose of encompassing the death of an innocent man, whom he hated.

"With that point I have already dealt. The idea in itself is too callous to dilate upon.

"In the prisoner's confession to Herbert Darrent, he accounted for the loss of his knife in the same manner that the defence has insisted upon. He took it out to open the cigar box, forgot it, and it was left lying upon the table—a handy weapon for the murderer. To that point of the defence I will but add a word.

"If the murderer of Josiah Marsden came to the Grange with intent to murder, would he have left the finding of the weapon to chance, or would he have come prepared? If he came prepared, would he use a chance weapon, or trust to the one he knew?

"Let me now, before you retire to consider your verdict, put into a few words the whole evidence. *Against* the prisoner you have the last words of the dying man, the knife, the long-standing quarrel, the absence of a reasonable *alibi*; and *for* him——" The judge pauses, and deliberately turns back the pages of his book, while the whole audience seems to throb with emotion.

"It's a fearful summing-up," one barrister whispers to another.

"Brutal—dead against him, poor devil," his companion replies, glancing at the prisoner, who, pale as death, gazes before him with eyes that see nothing.

"While for him," the judge impassively continues, "you have the line of defence that he left the Grange hours before the murder was committed."

The judge closes his book, and we await his peroration. We feel that we know what it will be.

"If you have no doubt, it is your duty to do your duty—an eye for an eye, a life for a life," and many more rounded phrases with which a judge is usually pleased to torment a man whose life or death is to be settled within the next hour; but we are mistaken.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he says, "the case is in your hands." And that is all. The summing up is over.

"Poor devil," someone whispers again, and we shudder. It puts into words what we dared not think.

The jury do not move. They only whisper in the box. It seems as if they are going to decide without leaving it; but perhaps the seriousness of their task comes over them, and they slowly leave, and the prisoner is conducted from the dock.

"Dead against him," is the general opinion. "Fair and just, but dead against him; he hadn't got a line of defence in his whole case."

The judge has retired, but no one else leaves the court. We all feel it is not a case of waiting for hours, but minutes, perhaps only seconds. The last words of the summing up crash through our brains. What do they amount to? *Against* the prisoner you have—everything; *for* him—nothing.

THE VERDICT.

The jury re-enter the box, the judge returns, the prisoner, between two warders, takes his place in the dock, the chaplain is by the side of the judge.

"Gentleman of the jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner, Astray Marsden, guilty or not guilty of the murder of Josiah Marsden?"

"Guilty!"

A woman's scream, half stifled in its birth, breaks the fearful silence of the Court—a scream followed by a gasp. We all breathe hard, as what we knew must happen, comes.

Then the deathlike silence falls like a pall upon us again.

"Prisoner in the dock," a voice is saying—and it seems to come from somewhere miles away, even to us—what must it seem to him?—"have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

A SCENE.

Our eyes turned with one impulse towards the dock, and we start with amazement.

The prisoner—the man condemned to death—whom we had pitied throughout the trial as one so miserable that he could not defend himself, is transformed.

He stands erect, with almost a glow upon his cheeks, nearly a smile upon his lips, manhood and courage awakening in his eye. He is condemned to death, and stands as though his fetters had been released.

We are creatures of impulse. We gaze at one another. The same thought is in every mind: "Suppose he is innocent!" There is mesmerism in his glance, and we follow it as it rests upon the girl with her head thrown forward on her arms upon the solicitors' table.

The judge shifts uneasily, moves as though to speak, he seems held powerless by that strange force which is upon us all.

The girl feels the power of that glance, and as if in obedience to its command, throws back her veil and rises and faces Astray Marsden, and as she does so even the heavens add to the intensity of the scene.

The sun is setting. We are shrouded in gloom, save for one glorious beam of light which passes over the shoulder of the prisoner and floods the face of the girl with a halo of light.

They face one another, and we pause and watch, lost in the mystery of the thoughts that are passing between them.

"Ethel."

Only the lifting of the face more towards him shows that she has heard.

"Do you believe me guilty? Do you believe that I am a murderer?"

"No."

It is only a whisper, but it thrills us. Where have our sophistries gone, where are our deductions, when compared with the love of this woman who stands like this before the world?

"If I were a free man, would you marry me as you promised years ago?"

"Yes."

The prisoner turns to the judge, the girl resumes her seat, and the spell is broken.

"I have nothing to say, my Lord, but that I am innocent."

DEATH.

We know that Astray Marsden was sentenced to death, because it was the duty of the judge to do so. More we cannot say. We went to the last day of the trial feeling we knew what the end would be. We left it doubting, wondering, perplexed.

The emotion of the moment is passed, but now as we write, we wonder still—wonder and are perplexed.

CHAPTER VII.

DARRENT MAKES A FRESH DISCOVERY.

IT was the morning after the great sensational trial, and Herbert Darrent sat at his breakfast in the coffee-room of the Green Dragon Hotel at Exeter.

The table he had selected was a small one by the window, and he sat there neglecting his breakfast, and moodily staring out into the street. Then he began his meal, but his appetite seemed to have deserted him.

"Theatrical, theatrical, that's all," he muttered to himself, as if in answer to his secret thoughts. "Done for effect," and he drank his coffee and picked up the morning paper, only to throw it down again impatiently as the displayed headlines caught his eye:

THE DETECTIVE'S TRIUMPH.

THE ENGLISH LECOQ.

ASTRAY MARSDEN CONDEMNED.

EXCITING SCENE IN COURT.

The headlines jarred upon him. Why? The detective's triumph. It was a triumph; everyone said so, and yet never had he succeeded in a case that had left behind such an unsettled feeling—such a degree of uncertainty and doubt as to whether he was really right after all. He could not understand it himself. Everything had seemed to be as clear as daylight, and the judge and jury, aye, the very spectators, had shared the view that his deductions had led him to form long ago, that Astray Marsden was the culprit.

"All for effect," he muttered again to himself, his mind still on the final scene in the court, with the last ray of sunlight falling full on the woman's face, as she avowed before all her unalterable belief in the innocence of Astray Marsden. "Theatrical, that was all," and yet somehow he could not shake off remembrance of that final scene. Whether it was acting or not, it had made a deep impression on Herbert Darrent.

"Shouldn't wonder if it has a good result for him; rouses sensation and sympathy, and they get up a petition for a reprieve. It's a clever dodge." He called it "a dodge," to shake his own doubts, and yet he could not help feeling that there was no collusion in that last scene of all. Still it is best to try and delude one's conscience at such times as these. Dull it, stifle it if it wants to speak and disturb that supremely happy feeling of self-satisfaction that is so pleasant to experience.

To be emotional in this nineteenth century is to be weak, or worse than anything, old-fashioned. If something happens in the course of one's daily life that is keen and painful enough to wring one's heart, the formula is—give sympathy a stunning blow and call the whole thing "a dodge," and then go on with life exactly as before. Yes, that is the wiser, the better, and very frequently the cheaper way. It's only a dodge, that's all, pass on and forget it.

Having stigmatised the dramatic denouement of the trial as "a dodge" in sufficiently stern a voice to frighten away, for the time being at any rate, all his inner promptings, Darrent picked up the paper again and turned to the leading article. The trial again of course.

It was headed "THE ENGLISH LECOQ." Country journals do so love to follow the lead of their London contemporaries, and it set forth with abundant praise, the ability, the zeal, the acumen of one Herbert Darrent, detective. Set it forth in such a florid, high-flown style that the subject of these commendations would have flushed, except that his inner-self had not yet recovered from the stunning blow that had been dealt it by modern cynicism.

Then the article went on to refer to the emotional scene at the conclusion of the trial. "A stranger scene," it remarked, "it has never been our lot to witness," and Darrent, startled from his habitual composure, jumped to his feet with an exclamation of surprise.

Perhaps the compositor, engaged upon setting up that column of the EXETER EXAMINER had been carried away by the sensationalism of the trial, or perhaps by something else, but in setting that line he had made a peculiar mistake, which had been passed by the reader and now appeared in every issue of that day's paper. He had misplaced the spacing "lead" which should have made the division between the word "A" and "stranger," and the sentence which had so startled Herbert Darrent read "Astra nger scene it has never been our lot to witness."

The second combination of letters "nger" might have been a portion of a cryptogram, it was so meaningless. The first "Astra" had a meaning for Darrent that set

A really up-to-date and bright article is contributed by W. A. Penn to the Double Number of the ATHLETIC RECORD. It deals with football in America, and is specially interesting in view of the recent agitation in the States for the abolition of the game.

his brain wildly to work, and caused a nasty feeling at his heart.

It was a strange coincidence that the leading article on the trial should contain such a glaring error. Emotional people would have called it "the finger of Providence," but of course it was not, it was simply the error of a compositor, who, perhaps, had had too much to drink, or at any rate was not at the instant thinking of what he was doing.

Let us account for all things naturally if we can. We abominate superstition in the nineteenth century, and really never care to discuss "the finger of Providence" at all.

"A—s—t—r—a. A stranger," Darrent muttered. "Suppose old Marsden died before he could write what he intended to! Suppose another second of life would have altered all things! Why did not the defence think of that? Astray Marsden quarrelled with Josiah and left him, a third person entered, and that person was the one who committed the deed. Josiah Marsden, dying and alone, remembered. Something warned him that Astray would be accused, and he wrote what he intended should prove his innocence. No one can say what were the exact words he intended to write. "I am dying, murdered by a strange man, who forced his way into the house." It might have been that, it might have been anything after the word "strange," the word which before he could complete, death overtook him, and his very handwriting condemned the man whom he had tried to save.

The more Darrent thought, the more moody became his reflections. Was it possible he had blundered? Was it possible that the man now lying under sentence of death in Exeter gaol was only the victim of a series of circumstantial incidents, that he had so cleverly put together. He turned to finish the breakfast that he had neglected, but all inclination for food had vanished, and he pushed his plate aside and stared out of the window again, and, as he gazed, there continually dinned in his ears one sentence: "Suppose you've been mistaken! Suppose you've been mistaken!"

The repetition grew simply maddening; he could bear it no longer, he would retest every theory, he would retrace his steps, go right back to the beginning, follow every clue from a different standpoint, and see where it led him; see if there was anything, no matter how minute, that he had overlooked. He turned to the newspaper once more, and as he glanced down the columns a chess diagram caught his eye—the usual weekly problem—"White to play and mate in two moves." In an instant Darrent's mind was alert on a new scent.

So easy had been the trail, that he had followed, so clearly had it pointed to the guilt of Astray Marsden, that he had quite overlooked the robbery of the chessmen. They had seemed to have no real connection with the actual murder, and they had slipped from his memory. Now, and it came forcibly back to him, he had better try and trace them, and find what bearing they had upon the case. He recalled how he had built up a theory that if he could only find those chessmen he would be very near achieving mate upon the murderer's game. What step should he take now? He somehow could not disabuse his mind of the nasty, uneasy feeling that had possessed it that perhaps he had put the hemp round an innocent man's neck, and in three weeks' time, unless he proved himself to have been wrong, to have followed a bad theory to a false end, the noose would be drawn, all would be over, and Astray Marsden gone beyond recall.

He went upstairs to his room and took from his bag the odd pawn, and the piece of tissue paper containing the chip of ivory—his new clues.

It was a big, manly task Darrent was going to enter upon, because if he proved that the conclusions he had already arrived at were false, and that all along he had followed a false scent, he wrote for himself and his lauded ability an awful denunciation. If, on the other hand, he only confirmed his first theory there was nothing further to go on working for—beyond self satisfaction and contentment. Was it worth while, after all? he pondered. Why not let things take their course?

He stepped out into the street and paused irresolute for a few moments, then suddenly making up his mind, he walked rapidly to the railway station and took the train for Bideford.

He had decided that the first new step he must pursue was to ascertain from Ethel Kingston anything he could as to the real relationship between Astray Marsden and the murdered man, and further, what were the grounds upon which old Marsden had forbidden the marriage of Astray with her. Perhaps in that very refusal of consent to the alliance there might be something that would lead him on a fresh scent, something that would dull or satisfy that aching that had taken possession of his mind, that would allay the haunting fear that perhaps, after all, he was wrong.

When Darrent reached Bideford he experienced but little trouble in finding the abode of Ethel Kingston, for upon a tiny burnished plate on a door in the High Street, he read the name, and, underneath, the word "Milliner."

How, wondered Darrent, as he stood awaiting an answer to his knock, would he find the woman who had taken that unrehearsed part in the dramatic scene at the Exeter Assizes. Would she be prostrated with grief, and refuse to see him, or would she upbraid and assail him for having so steadfastly pursued and convicted the man she loved, the man whom she believed to be innocent, and whom, if he were but free she had sworn before all men she would marry. While Darrent turned these possibilities over in his mind the door was opened by the girl herself, who could ill-conceal a start of astonishment as he raised his hat.

"You have come from him?" she queried.

"Yes," answered Darrent, as he accepted her invitation to enter. "I have come, Miss Kingston," he continued, "because to-day I do not feel quite so satisfied as I have been all along about the guilt of Astray Marsden."

"And yet it is due to you, and you alone, that he is condemned."

"I only did what was my duty. I only pieced together facts, and the jury decided upon those facts. To-day I come to you because I feel that one of those very facts is weakened, and its weakness weakens the whole chain."

"Pray go on. It is life and death to him—to me."

Darrent took a seat beside her, and drew from his pocket the paper that he had been reading that morning, and, folding it to the leading article, said:

"Miss Kingston, when Astray Marsden asked you in court if you believed him guilty, and you answered 'No'; when he asked you if you would marry him if he were free, and you answered 'Yes,' it for the moment lessened my belief in his guilt; but when I again reviewed all the facts, that shadowy feeling of doubt vanished, and I was as sure as ever of that guilt. I slept well last night—a sleep undisturbed by any dreams torturing me that I might have helped to condemn an innocent man—but this morning I felt depressed, and when I opened this paper, out of your very words of yesterday, out of the very episode that had momentarily shaken my confidence in his guilt, had grown another incident that, unsuperstitious as I am, seemed nothing short of a miraculous coincidence. If you had not spoken yesterday, these words that I am going to show you now would never have been written, the mistake could not have occurred, and it might never have entered my mind that justice had perhaps miscarried."

He placed the paper on the table and pointed to the leading article with the misplaced space: "Astra nger scene it has never been our lot to witness."

For some moments Ethel Kingston could scarcely master her emotion as she gazed at the printed lines, and sinking back into her seat she covered her face with her hands.

Darrent waited until she had in some measure regained her composure, and then speaking very quietly, said:

"Miss Kingston, I have already told you I'm not a superstitious man, and I don't believe in signs and omens, but this accident or coincidence—call it what you will—has weakened my belief in myself, and has determined me to retest this case in every detail, to follow again every clue, and see if I can find anywhere where the chain is faulty, any single instance where I have erred, where I have assumed too much, or have allowed too little."

A thankful look lightened her face for a moment as she answered:

"Oh! If it only is so; if you, who have so painstakingly followed the clues to this awful end, should find some other evidence that should prove him innocent? Oh, Merciful Heaven! it must be proved. He is innocent—he is innocent!"

Again Darrent waited until she had become calmer.

"Can you," he asked, as he took his note-book from his pocket, "give me any reason why old Marsden was so bitter against the marriage of yourself and Astray?"

"I only know that many years ago, while I was away at school in Exeter, my father—a widower—quarrelled with Josiah Marsden. What about, I never learnt, but from that day until my father died, the two were deadly enemies, and old Mr. Marsden forbade Astray to ever see or speak to me."

"Do you know anything of the real relationship between Astray and the old man?"

"I only know what Astray told me, and that was that Mr. Marsden adopted him when he was quite a child, and that he had no recollection of his parents."

"You do not think that Josiah might have been his father?"

"I do not know, Mr. Darrent; indeed I do not know."

"Never mind," answered Darrent soothingly. "Now tell me, did you see Astray Marsden between his return to England from Africa and the murder at the Grange? Remember, I am asking now to try and save him, tell me all you know."

"No, I had not seen him for two years until I saw him after the murder."

"But he had written to you."

"Repeatedly."

Darrent paused again. He seemed to be able to get no further in this problem. Nothing was different to what he had built up all along. This woman could give him no further information, and yet there was still the aching doubt that had been with him all day. His mind reviewed the clues from which he had put together the evidence; those clues had all passed out of his possession now, into the hands of the Crown, all except the chessman and the broken piece of ivory. They had seemed subsidiary to the main crime that had fitted so well to Astray Marsden, that he had kept them to himself, kept them with, perhaps, the idea that one of these days he might run across the remainder of the set, and find out what part, if any, they played in the drama upon which the curtain would then have, long since, been rung down. He recollected that he had placed the pawn in his pocket before he left Exeter that morning, and, almost unconsciously, he took the little carved piece out and gazed at it.

Rising suddenly from the table the girl crossed the room, and, taking from the sideboard a sandal wood box, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory, opened it, and displayed to Darrent's astonished gaze a set of chessmen of which that pawn evidently formed a part.

"These," she said, "look exactly like the one you have in your hand, Mr. Darrent. Do you think that they may help you, that there may be some clue in them?"

Darrent, almost too overcome with surprise to answer, slowly took the pieces out, and arranged them on the table. There were thirty-one; a red pawn was missing. He placed the red pawn he had taken from his pocket beside the others, it was a *fac simile*, there could be no question that it belonged to the set. Then Darrent turned his attention to the white pieces; he scrutinised the delicate work of the bishop's embroidered vestments, the carved pagodas on the backs of the elephants, the flowing robes of the king and queen. He took the white queen in his hand, and examined the carving. Yes, a tiny piece had been chipped off, just a little fragment of the delicate ivory filigree crown that rested on the curling hair. He replaced the pieces in the box, except the red pawn and the white queen, and, taking from his pocket-book the scrap of ivory that he picked up from the library floor, fitted it exactly into the broken part of the crown. Yes, beyond all doubt this was the set of chessmen stolen from the Grange; and where had he found them? In the house of the *fiancée* of the man now lying under sentence of death for the murder.

A sudden revulsion of feeling seemed to sweep over Darrent. He had, he felt, been wasting his sympathy to no purpose. Doubting his own acumen, he had started on a fresh track, he had commenced to reconsider all his conclusions, and yet the very first new step that he had taken had only the more deeply confirmed the damning evidence that his former efforts had accumulated.

"Mr. Darrent, do you think it will help your case? Do you think these will prove anything?" she asked, breaking the long pause.

"Let me ask you a few questions before I answer."

"Yes, anything you like—anything that will help Astray."

"Where did you get these chessmen?"

"They were sent to me."

"By whom?"

"I do not know."

"Was there no letter or message with them?"

"None," she hesitatingly answers.

"Come, come, you must confide the whole truth to me if I am to help you and Astray. When did you receive them?"

"Two days after the murder."

"How?"

"They came by parcels post."

"Have you the wrapper still?"

"I daresay I can find it; shall I see?"

"One moment. You do not know who sent them?"

"No; but the same morning I had a letter from Astray, written in London, telling me that a small box would come addressed to me, that I was to unpack and take care of it for him until we met."

"You did not know he had been at Norcombe?"

"No."

"You have never seen these chessmen before?"

"No."

"Astray has never spoken to you about them?"

"Never."

"Thank you, that is all. You may now find me the paper in which the box came, if you will."

While Miss Kingston went in search of the paper, Darrent calmly slipped the ivory queen and the red pawn in his pocket, and laying the rest of the pieces evenly in the box closed the lid.

"Thank you," he said, as she returned and gave him the desired paper. "Thank you, and good-bye."

"Do you think there is any hope?" she asked.

"I cannot tell yet, we must do our best. Shall I say anything to Astray for you? I shall see him to-morrow."

"Only tell him that I know that he is innocent. I *know* it."

"More than I do," muttered Darrent to himself, as he walked towards the railway station.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE IVORY QUEEN'S SECRET.

THERE was no train back to Exeter till late in the afternoon, and Darrent filled in the time with a hearty meal and a long country walk, pondering over the discovery he had made that day, and feeling that the latest phase of the case only tended to deepen the evidence that had already condemned Astray Marsden to the scaffold.

When at last he found himself alone in a compartment of the train for Exeter, he drew from his pocket the paper that he had received from Miss Kingston in which the chessmen had been wrapped, and scrutinised it carefully. It was an ordinary sheet of coarse, brown paper with an adhesive address label, and a parcel-post docket bearing across the stamps the postmark of "Barnstaple, January 13th, 1896."

Darrent sat back in the corner of the carriage, lighted a cigar and ruminated. The train steamed into Exeter and he at once re-booked for Barnstaple. It was scarcely likely, he felt, that in the time that had elapsed, some six or seven weeks, that the post-office clerks would remember who handed in that parcel, or recognise the writing on the label, still, he would go to the post-office directly on his arrival in Barnstaple and make inquiries.

Suddenly the train pulled up with a jerk. Signals were against them at the Junction, and they stuck for a good quarter of an hour, with the result that when they did get

If you would like a magnificent drawing-room calendar for nothing, THE SUNDAY READER tells you how to obtain one.

into Barnstaple it had just turned eight, and was too late to interview the post office officials that night. He tried to find the clerk, but failed, and then how to kill the twelve hours till eight next morning became the problem that sorely perplexed him, for he must stop in Barnstaple that night, when suddenly he recalled his friend of the Regency Theatre. From the highly-coloured placards that decorated the streets and the entrance to the theatre, he learnt that an equally thrilling melodrama to that which was purveyed to the public on his last visit was in progress.

He found his way down the grimy passage again, and the stern janitor conveyed his card to Mr. Ridgeway, and brought it back with the message from the manager that he would be on the stage all the evening: but if Mr. Darrent would go in front and see the show, Mr. Ridgeway would see him afterwards, and on the card was pencilled an order for a stall. Darrent glanced at the writing, and received his second shock that day, and instead of accepting the hospitality of Mr. Ridgeway, he paid his money at the door, and carefully placed the card in his pocket-book.

With the fall of the curtain Mr. Darrent reached the stage door, and a couple of minutes afterwards was in the manager's room again.

Mr. Ridgeway motioned him to a seat, and awaited the commencement of the conversation, for while he could not deny that, upon the evidence submitted at the trial, the verdict had been a just one, he did not somehow feel over amiable towards the man who had, bit by bit, built up that evidence.

Darrent, who had great belief in the efficacy of getting home the first shot, suddenly opened fire.

"Why did you post a box of chessmen to Miss Ethel Kingston, Bideford, on the 13th January?" he asked.

The effect upon Mr. Arthur Ridgeway was instantaneous and astonishing, he simply collapsed into the nearest chair and gasped, "How the dickens did you know?"

"Never mind how I know. I ask you why did you do it?"

"I did it for Astray Marsden's sake."

"Come, come, Mr. Ridgeway, this is a little too thin—it's not a play you know."

"As sure as Heaven's above us, Mr. Darrent, that's the truth."

"Come, now," said the detective quietly, "you'd better make a clean breast of the whole affair, or you may find you've put yourself in a very serious position."

"Has Astray split?"

"Never mind what Astray's done. You tell me your version."

"There's not much to tell. I always liked young Marsden. I told you that when you came before; I always believed in him, and thought him a straight-going chap, and so I do now, mind you," said Ridgeway. "So I do now."

"Yes, yes, go on," calmly interjected Darrent.

"Well, the day after the murder, Astray came over here."

"Yes, I know."

"Looking scared and white, and begged and prayed me to go over to Norcombe the first thing the next morning, and to pretend to Dobson, the constable there, that I was a detective, and get him to give me a box of ivory chessmen from the library of the Grange. I was to say that Scotland Yard thought they were connected with the murder."

"Well, you did, eh?"

"I refused at first, but Astray persuaded me; he told me it might be a matter of life and death to him, and that he must have those chessmen before anyone came from London. He said I was the only man who could do it, and the only one he could trust. I was an actor, and could play the part—I could make up so that I should never be recognised, and I'd only have an idiot of a constable to deal with. He swore to me that he was innocent of the murder, and I believed him."

"So you went over to Norcombe and got the chessmen?"

"Yes."

"Well, you did it cleverly, Mr. Ridgeway, but it was not

quite so clever to address the box in your own handwriting to Miss Kingston at Bideford."

"I sent it there because I refused to keep them in my possession, and that was the address Astray gave me; but how the dickens you found it out——"

"Never mind how. I did. Now, Mr. Ridgeway, do you know anything further?"

"Nothing, upon my soul."

"Well, good night. I shouldn't wonder if you hear from me again." And Mr. Darrent strolled down the narrow picture gallery, with its fresh examples of vice vanquished and virtue victorious, leaving Mr. Ridgeway to ponder upon the position in which he had so suddenly found himself placed, and to speculate what his misplaced generosity on behalf of young Marsden might lead to.

The first train next morning brought Darrent to Exeter, and, having obtained permission from the authorities, he paid a visit to Astray Marsden in the gaol.

The time that had elapsed since his conviction had already had an effect upon the prisoner. He had grown very pale and sallow, his eyes were sunken, and deep black circles showed round them, telling of sleepless nights. Darrent gazed at him for a few moments without speaking, and Astray glared sullenly back at him, and neither broke the silence. At last Astray found his tongue.

"Well, what do you want?" he growled. "Haven't you done enough already? Do you want to gloat over my misery? You've hunted me down like the blood-hound that you are, and now you've come to glory in your work."

"I have come," Darrent answered, striving to keep calm in face of the torrent of words with which he was assailed, "I have come for two reasons. The first, to bring you a message from the girl who believes in you still. I come to say that she believes you innocent—will ever believe you innocent."

"Thank God for that!"

"That is my first duty, and I have discharged it, and now I have come to help you if I can."

"Help me. Hark at him—help me! Haven't you done enough for me already? Haven't you put the rope round my neck? What more can you do, eh?"

"Perhaps I can help to take it off again, if you are only reasonable and will answer a few plain questions."

"Well, go ahead. There's one consolation that things can't be worse even if you do take down what I say and use it in evidence against me. It won't avail now."

"Why," calmly asked Darrent, "did you instigate Arthur Ridgeway to steal that box of chessmen from the Grange and send them to Miss Kingston?"

Astray gazed in astonishment at Darrent. It was useless to attempt to deny the fact since Darrent knew it.

"Because I believed they were of the utmost value to me."

"Why?"

"Old Marsden had always led me to believe they were. He had always told me that there was some secret connected with them that I must one day know. Not in his lifetime, he said, but when he was gone, especially if he ever died suddenly. When we were good friends and used to play chess together in the old days at the Grange he would often say, as we set out the men, 'Don't forget, Astray, if anything ever happens to me you will find a secret hidden in those pieces—in the ivory queen.'"

"The ivory queen?"

"The white ivory queen. 'When I am gone, Astray—and I may go suddenly, one never knows!'"

"He said that?"

"Yes," he said. "Why should I lie now? 'When I am gone you will find a secret in the ivory queen that will explain all that I dare not tell you now,' that's what he said many a time."

"And so after the murder you got Arthur Ridgeway to impersonate a detective from Scotland Yard, and obtain those chessmen for you and then send them to Bideford, where you thought they would be safe."

"Yes."

"And you do not yet know the secret?"

"No, how could I? You tracked me down at once, arrested me in London, and I've never been free an instant since."

"Why did you never mention it at your trial?"

"What good could it do? It had nothing to do with the murder—leave me, leave me to myself, I've sworn to you that I am innocent—what's the good—you do not believe it. I've told the parson here I'm innocent, he does not believe it; all he says is 'Repent, repent.' I am sick of it all; I'm condemned, and I've got to suffer. For Heaven's sake leave me in peace until the end comes!"

And despite all Darrent's efforts to get him to talk, Astray Marsden would not open his lips again, would not utter another word, but sat glum and taciturn, staring into space with eyes that saw nothing, unless it was the ghastly outlines of a scaffold with a dangling rope.

Finding it useless to linger, Darrent left the gaol, and returned to his own room at the Green Dragon Hotel, and having locked the door, took out the two ivory chessmen, and carefully examined them. The pawn was cut out of one solid piece of ivory, with the exception of the flat base, which, with a dexterous twist of his strong fingers, Darrent unscrewed. There was no mystery about that, and he laid it on one side, and picked up the ivory queen. The little statue stood about three and a half inches high, and the base had a diameter of about an inch and a half, and formed a small circular platform upon which the figure stood, the flowing robe reaching to the edge all round.

Gripping the base, Darrent twisted it to the right, and the figure unscrewed, revealing a long narrow cavity running the whole length of the body, into which, tightly rolled up, a scrap of parchment had been pushed. With the blade of his penknife, he carefully withdrew the little scroll, which was about an inch long by two inches wide, and spread it out before him. It was covered with very small writing, and although the ink was somewhat faded, he made out without much difficulty the following inscription:

"*When the full moon shines through the centre pane of red glass in the top of the library window, its track along the floor will reach at midnight a knot in the wood; measure from that knot 3ft. to the west and 8ft. to the north, which will reach to the wainscot then measure 6ft. up the wall to the carved scroll and pull forward.—J. M.*"

Three times Darrent read the paper through. What could it mean? What mystery was there hidden behind those dark oak-panelled walls in the dreary library at the Grange? Was there some guilty secret stowed away that old Marsden had hidden all through his life, but had wished when he was dead that Astray should know? Was there possibly some clue to the real murderer? Something that should tell an avenger where to search for old Marsden's enemy—the deadly enemy that had struck the murderous blow? Or

was there some concealed wealth lying behind that panel, for which Josiah Marsden had been murdered? If he had been murdered for that wealth, those who had killed him knew where the treasure was hidden, and no doubt had stolen it already. It was useless to speculate, he must go back to Norcombe at once, follow out the instructions of the parchment, and see what was the result. And so once more Darrent took train for Barnstaple, and once more covered the seven miles to Norcombe.

"Now," said Darrent to himself, as alone he entered the library at the Grange; "I'm not going to wait for any hocus-pocus of moonlight and midnight, I'm just going for this ornamental scroll work, and if there's a bit of it loose I'll find it, and what's behind it too." In the gathering dusk he took a rule from his pocket and measured 6ft. from the ground on the portion of the wall not covered by the bookcases, and found that that was exactly the height of the ornamental scroll work on the panelling. Then, with a portable electric lamp and a large magnifying glass, he carefully examined the carving. Presently he came to a piece where a join in the wood could be discerned, and pulling it forward a panel some 8in. or 10in. long came with it, disclosing a narrow space behind, in which lay a small leather-covered volume. Darrent took the book out and pushed back the panel; then seating himself in one of the corners by the fireplace proceeded to read:

JOSIAH MARSDEN'S DIARY.

PARIS, *Oct. 8th*, 1871.—Back in my hotel at last, and now I can pause and think of what I have gone through in this accursed city, Paris, the City of Light. Bah! Paris, the City of Death.

Was it fancy or did each passer-by shun me as I walked through the deserted streets this morning? Did they see murder in my eye? The coming brand of Cain upon my forehead? Let me write clearly what has befallen me, so that if it should ever chance that this is read, it may speak in my defence; it may show, at least, that I am not an assassin by choice, but by circumstance.

Who can say what guides us to our fate? If there had been a seat at the Opera to-night I should not be what I am now. But the opera is a great success, there was not a seat to be had, and so I strolled about until I lost myself in the labyrinth of squalid streets and alleys on the South side of the river. Suddenly a scream broke out upon the night—the cry of a woman proceeding from a house in darkness, save for an upper story, where a beam of light cut a pathway through the blackness. It would have been well if I had passed on unheeding, but without thinking I rushed to the entrance. It was open, and I sped up the shaky staircase and pushed open a door upon the third floor. Not a light, not a sound. I paused irresolute, and then felt the cold barrel of a pistol against my temple. A dozen hands held me powerless while my arms were tied to my sides.

"Who is it?" I gasped

"Shoot, you fool, shoot!" a man replied, and I gave myself up for lost.

"It is a pig of an Englishman," one growled; and then there arose a subdued mutter of voices in German which I could not follow.

"Why did you come here?" some one asked in French.

"I thought I heard a scream."

"You're a spy!"

"Why don't you shoot instead of talking?"

"What's the good of that? What are we to do with the body?"

Once more the consultation was held. Now and again I caught a word in French, but most of the language was in German, with occasionally a sentence in an unknown tongue. Perhaps it was Russian.

And all this time I was securely bound, with not a glimmer of light to show me who my assailants were. The consultation became more excited, and then at last it subsided into grunts, and someone addressed me again.

"You have put yourself into this position," he said, speaking in French with a foreign twang, "by interfering in other people's business. You will be allowed to depart"—my heart beat wildly—"when you have become one of us."

"Who are you?"

"That will not concern you if you were born under a lucky star. If not, you will have cause to know. We are about to draw lots with an object."

The pistol barrel touched my temple again.

"Will you share in the drawing or say good-bye to life?"

"What do we draw for?" I gasped in terror.

"To decide who shall kill the daughter of a traitor. We never kill the culprit himself. Our revenge is more ingenious. We leave him to the last. Do you consent to become one of us in this lottery?"

"No," I faltered, and then ere the word had left my lips, so strong is the love of life, I relented, and gasped: "Yes."

"Then draw."

If you discover any discrepancies between the text and the illustrations in this story, turn to the footline on page 404.

A box was placed underneath my hand, and again a voice cried: "Draw." I thrust in my hand and drew out a small marble.

"You have had a fair chance," the same voice said, "you are the first. There are thirty-nine white balls and one red."

And still we were in darkness as the box went round.

A lamp was lighted. A lamp only throwing a small circle of light upon a black table, and each man approached, held his hand in that circle, and opened it.

White, white, white, white! I knew mine was the red. I felt it burning my flesh as I gripped it within my hand, and as I opened it beneath the light, it rolled forth—lifeless!

"When you have earned your admittance you will be one of us," the spokesman said, and then I was conducted down the pitch dark stairs and thrust out into the street.

I gazed around to locate myself, and at last found my way back across the Seine and to my hotel. I cannot believe the events of the night, I am too ill to realise them.

It cannot be true! It is too horrible!

Oct. 10th.—It is true! Pinned on the coverlet of my bed this morning was a piece of paper on which was scrawled: "If you go to inform the police you will be assassinated as you leave the office." I can write no more. It is true!

Oct. 15th.—I have seen her. Seen the woman whom I have been bidden to kill. To kill because her father has offended a bloodthirsty clique. It was at the opera. I was sent so that I might know her, and remember her! Can I ever forget her? My stall was close to her box. I have seen the loveliest woman in this world; watched her for an hour only, and become her slave. She noticed it. She blushed, and yet looked kindly upon me; she did not, could not, realise that she had been marked for slaughter for her father's sins.

Oct. 18th.—I have met her, clasped her hand, gazed into her eyes, and told her with mine that I adore her. I could almost bless the evil-minded gang who made all things so smooth for me, who gave me the *entrée* to her. Fools! They do not know that I will give my life willingly for her. But of what avail will that be? They will kill me first, and then choose another to murder her.

Astrea de Lanez. The sound itself is music. I must warn her—I must save her. But how?

Oct. 30th.—It is all over; she is mine.

A month ago I knew her not, and to-day she has owned—owned with the blushes of innocence—that she loves me. Loves me—Josiah Marsden—one not worthy of her lightest thought. The world is a dream.

Oct. 31st.—I have received another note from the assassins—pinned on my coverlet, as before. They call me "Comrade" now, but show impatience, and say I must earn admittance within the next fourteen days. Kill her, and earn admittance.

Nov. 2nd.—It has been a terrible day. I have told her everything—told her my history—and we have considered what to do. She trusts me. She will quit Paris suddenly, leaving it to me to follow when I can without drawing those fiends upon her, and we shall be married. I have seen her father; he consents.

Nov. 4th.—I have fooled them. A half-written note urging her to meet me in an unfrequented part of Paris, which I intentionally left in my room, drew attention from her for one night, and she has left Paris to wait for me in London. While a man was dogging me as I walked, she was far away. Perhaps they will revenge themselves upon me, but I care not. She is safe and well provided for.

Nov. 10th.—I have heard from her. She has passed through London, and is staying in Scotland, where I know she will be safe.

Nov. 25th.—Her father was discovered shot dead in Paris this morning. I dare not tell her. Who will be the next? Who is this nameless gang? What is their purpose? I dare not stop here. I am overcome with dread at every hour of the day. Every shadow is a lurking assassin.

ROME, *May 3rd*, 1872.—Six months since I have written in my diary. Six months of misery. Touring through Southern Europe, always followed, always watched, my heart aches to see her again, but I dare not, for with me I should carry death.

MARSEILLES, *May 20th.*—Free! I can scarcely realise it. There has been a terrible railway accident, and the one who has tracked me through Europe is dead. I could almost pity the poor wretch, as I saw him lying torn and mangled in the fearful chaos. Only a dozen unharmed out of that train load, and I, one of them. Good-bye to horror, misery, and concealment. To-morrow morning I leave for London by sea, and let them find me, if they can.

EDINBURGH, *June 30th.*—What a gloomy diary. I ought to recommence to-day and write in one all gold and silver, with a white silk cover, embossed with orange blossoms. But why should I write at all?—Let me close the book, and forgetting all the past live only in the happiness of the present. It is an ugly dream, let me forget it, and close the book for ever.

(Here there was a blank page in the diary, and then in darker ink it went on):

THE GRANGE, NORCOMBE, *May*, 1884.—I have come home broken, despairing, ready for death, anxious to die, all I had is gone. All that I valued lost. Let death come—a happy release—be it by the assassin's knife or otherwise—but let it come. Speedily, now as I sit and write, come death and bring me peace!

No; Death only comes to those who fear him. Death shuns those who would welcome him with open arms; grins his ghastly grin and cries: "Live on, you'd be too happy if I took you; live on till you fear me more, then I'll strike." But I cannot seek death; life is nothing to me, and yet there's my son, Astray. I feel I am mad—I almost hate him, because he reminds me so much of her.

Twelve years since last I opened my diary. Twelve years ago my hand touched these pages, and I bade good-bye to gloom. Bade good-bye to gloom when it was yet to become blacker than ever.

I remember it as though it were but yesterday. Remember that she was looking over me as I wrote, her arm upon my shoulder. I had nothing more to write then. Every day would have been the same; all happiness, and that reads so feeble when set down in black and white. Misery becomes intensified, the writing makes it colder and harder.

Then Astray was born. I loved him then, perhaps because she did. Now I have no love for anyone, only for the past. My heart is filled with hatred, a hatred deep and bitter, that will keep me alive until it is satisfied. We never came to the Grange, we were happy in that cottage on the heather-covered hills, and wanted nothing more.

Business called me again to Paris. If I did not go I would lose a fortune, and man is human after all. I remember now how she clung to me and begged me to let it pass; but man is human after all, and human nature says: "Get money," and I went.

Went and was discovered. I knew it, I saw the man start. He spoke to me. I recognised his voice, and he mine. I was back in the past, and the past was alive again.

I dared not go back to Scotland, but came to London, shadowed every step of the way. The past ever with me, alive again. Then I wrote to her. Her first thoughts were for her boy—not for herself, not for me. I write it because I know it. Perhaps I am jealous of my own son. Well, I'm getting hard and cold now. What if I am? She sent him to a place of safety. Parted with him—a little mite who could scarcely speak—in case the evil-minded gang should do him injury. She stayed in Scotland, and I at the Grange—stayed there because I commanded it—because I said that no one knew we were married, and the time would come when the gang would tire of watching me.

No stranger appeared in Norcombe; I grew confident again; what I had thought was shadowing, I told myself was imagination. I grew careless, and then—I write it firmly—then I murdered her—I murdered her.

Throwing aside all thought, I paid a flying visit to Scotland, and saw her—saw her for the last time.

I went again, arrived to find the house deserted, only a lying telegram of yesterday upon the table:

"Come to London by the ten o'clock train.—JOSIAH."

She had gone, and that is ten years ago. Ten years I have spent in searching—searching in vain, and I have come home now to await the end.

The boy—my boy—I have brought to the Grange, brought him here five years ago, and now I live for him only.

(Again there was a blank page in the diary.)

THE GRANGE, *June*, 1894.—I am calmer than I have been for years. I am revenged—a life for a life. I set out for Paris, not this time to hunt for her, but to demand the scriptural forfeit—a life for a life. I gloat over it. Only I'm mad now. They call me Mad Marsden in the village, and shrink as I pass. How they'd shrink if they knew all! I have killed him, murdered him, stabbed him! It wasn't wrong; a life for a life—there's my excuse, the excuse I'll shriek to my judges. A command, a command from the Scriptures: 'A life for a life.' He and his gang killed her, and I am revenged. He was getting old, and so am I. We were both young when we first met, and now he is dead—dead by my own hand. He shrank back when first we met. He saw his doom in my eye. He could use the knife, and so could I. I think I laughed as I felt that blade go straight to its mark. I suppose I am mad, but I'm revenged.

To Paris and back in a week. What luck to have met him as I did. More than a year ago since Astray left—left because I would tell him nothing of the past. He was always asking what mystery there was about his life. Always flying into a passion because I wouldn't tell him all. I was a fool to let him know there even was a mystery, and he's a fool not to see in my every action I try to guard his life. I should like to see him once more—see him and tell him he can marry the girl he wants to. I've been hard and cold ever since the day my wife was lured away. I've oppressed everyone till I'm hated by all. They don't think old Marsden was ever young.

Jan. 11th, 1896.—Astray has been and gone. He came back after two years to be good friends, and we have quarrelled again.

He has gone—gone for good, I suppose, this time. He did not plead as he used, but stood above me, and demanded to know who he was, and who his parents were. He little knew he spoke to his own father, and I would not tell him—why, I know not, but after my death he will know all. The ivory queen, as I have told him all his life, will reveal the secret. The ivory queen he has sworn he will not touch until I am in my grave. Why don't I tell him all? Because I'm mad perhaps. Perhaps because I cannot bear another, even my own son—to share my misery. If he knew, his soul would go out in pity to his mother. I am mad, for I should be jealous even of that. But no, I feel softer, a better light breaks in upon me, after these years of misery. I understand now why I have kept this secret; why I will keep it to my grave, and past the grave to eternity. I might have found sympathy in my son, years ago, if I had obeyed the promptings of my heart. But for his sake I have kept it to myself. He shall never know. Let him live his life happily with the girl he has chosen. To-night I bury the past, to-morrow I will begin afresh. I have yearned to recognise him as my son all these years. To-morrow the parchment in the ivory queen shall be destroyed, and I will tell him his mother died; invent some story why I could not recognise him before and all will be well.

To-night I bid my book good-bye for ever. I dare not read its pages; let them die. To-night I place it where it has been hidden for years—place it there and forget it.

To-morrow I shall awaken in a new life. Astray my son, and his wife that is to be, shall brighten the last years of my life. I feel happier and brighter in the thought of what will be. Good-bye to the past—to my diary and its horrors. Good-bye to thoughts of hatred and death. Let me think of her with softer memories of how she lived. For Astray's sake I want to live now—I want to live.—J. M.

And there the diary ended.

CHAPTER IX.

HERBERT DARRENT VISITS PARIS

THREE days had passed since Darrent had pored over the secret pages of Josiah Marsden's diary. He had spent the time in working back upon his clues, trying to find a different set of circumstances to fit into the story of the diary, and so bring about Astray Marsden's release.

That he was innocent now he felt assured, and yet would the law accept the diary as a complete refutation on Astray's behalf of the crime for which he was now condemned to death? It seemed to Darrent so wild, so out of place in this nineteenth century, that a man should be hunted to death by a secret society, of which he knew nothing. So out of place in life—only suited for the pages of a sensational novel.

He had had a lengthy interview with the authorities, but they had not been overcome with the idea of any miscarriage of justice having taken place, and had asked if every morsel of evidence had not pointed to the guilt of Astray Marsden. The case had been so evident, so obvious, and yet improbable as it read, there might *perhaps* be some truth in the diary—justice did not seek a victim, but wanted the guilty man. If he were not Astray Marsden, then Darrent had permission to use the short time at his disposal to find the man, and justice would be satisfied. To Darrent, who now earnestly believed in the innocence of Astray Marsden, it was a fight between himself and the law. He had obtained the necessary permission to see Astray whenever he chose to do so, and now sat watching him as he read the pages of Marsden's diary. Astray finished his reading, and laid the diary down with a sigh.

"A fearful story," he exclaimed with a deep sigh as he finished the last page. "Then he was my father?"

Darrent nodded his head.

"Hounded through life, hounded to death because he would not do the biddings of a gang of assassins! It's terrible—too terrible to believe. My mother lured away and murdered, my father, stabbed in his own house, a defenceless old man, for what? Bloodthirstiness alone. But I will be revenged. We know now where to seek for the assassins. Where to look for the hand that struck that fatal blow. In the remnants of that gang we shall find my father's murderer. That diary must release me from the condemned cell, and my life shall be devoted to the search. I will never pause until I have brought the man who struck that blow to justice. I swear it. It is in Paris we shall have to look; in Paris we will seek until some chance clue helps us to attain our object. When shall I be set free? When can we start?"

"I shall start to-day."

"Good, and I will follow when they have released me. How is it possible that such a murderous society could exist? What are its objects? What are its secrets that, after years and years of waiting, it yet took its revenge?"

"My dear Marsden," Darrent replied calmly, "Paris is even now the hot-bed of such societies, and was more so when your father was there. It is full of secret associations, French, Russian, German, and every other nationality. Your father, unfortunately, became suspected, and they never forget."

"Then go, Darrent. Lose no time, and I will follow when I am released."

Darrent rose to his feet and placed his hands on Astray's shoulders.

"You're so full of your father that you have forgotten your own peril," he remarked.

"My own peril!" Astray exclaimed.

"Yes; the authorities do not look on that diary as a complete establishment of your innocence. Mind you, I think you will be reprieved, but, unless I can discover more, I'm afraid your actual release is a long way off."

"But it *proves* I am innocent."

"It does not go far enough. I leave for Paris to get more evidence. To test what is set down in this diary, and then to bring the chosen member of this gang to justice, and so obtain your release. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, the law does not want to lose its grip of its victim unless another is placed ready for its vengeance. I will not detain you. Go."

With a hearty handshake, a promise that "all would yet be right," Darrent left Astray Marsden and made his way to London *en route* for Paris.

A week passed before Herbert Darrent was back in Exeter, and then he arrived by the afternoon train, but

Turn to page 397. There you will find particulars of a football competition, the like of which you have never seen before.

instead of alighting went on to Barnstaple and took a fly to Norcombe. He asked at the police-station for the address of the woman who figured in the case as the housekeeper of Josiah Marsden, and learning it, made his way to the cottage, which he left in about half-an-hour, with a very satisfied look upon his face and returned to Exeter.

Next morning Astray was aroused from his apathy by the entrance of the detective, and in a moment was on his feet and gripping his hand.

"Back at last, Darrent," he exclaimed excitedly. "I thought I should be done for before you returned. Tell me at once, have you found him?"

Darrent shook his head, and Astray sank back into his seat.

"Then you have been unsuccessful?"

"Not altogether," Darrent replied, "but things have turned out very differently to what I expected. I reached Exeter yesterday afternoon, but went on to Norcombe and visited the woman, Margaret Gadsden, who acted as your father's housekeeper. You remember?"

Astray nodded his head.

"That visit was to settle the last point in connection with my journey to Paris. Look at the page of the diary headed June, 1894, you'll see what it says. 'I set out for Paris, not this time to hunt for her, but to demand the scriptural forfeit—I have killed him——'"

"Enough, enough," Astray cried, "that is the part of the book that haunts me; he died a murderer, murdered."

"I have killed him," Darrent calmly continued, "murdered him!"

Herbert Darrent paused impressively, and leaning towards Astray said; "That is not true."

"What?"

"Your father had not been half-a-dozen miles away from Norcombe during the last ten years. His mind was unhinged, he yearned for that man's life until, in his dreams, he killed him. That is all. I have told you this first, and now I will deal with my visit to Paris. This was the clue I started upon—this entry in the diary:

"'*Nov.* 25*th*, 1871.—Her father was discovered shot dead in Paris this morning. I dare not tell her. Who will be the next? Who is this nameless gang? What is their purpose? I dare not stop here.' To me it was obvious that that was the first step in the solution of the mystery, and an easy one. The records of the French police put me in possession of the whole of the facts connected with that murder, but they turned out to be very different to what I had anticipated. A man, Maurice de Lanez, was discovered shot dead, but"—Darrent again paused—"there was no mystery whatever.

"Maurice de Lanez caught his cashier red-handed in theft and sent for the police, but before they had time to arrive the man turned on him, shot him dead, and fled.

"He was captured next day on the outskirts of the city, tried, condemned, and guillotined. He died confessing that his sentence was a just one, for Lanez had been the best of masters. There was no other record of a murder of a man named de Lanez in that year or any other year."

"But the mystery?"

"There is no mystery."

"The assassins?"

"There are no assassins, and never were."

"The gang?"

"There is no gang."

"My brain reels. I cannot understand. What does it mean?"

"Listen. On October 8th, 1871—I am indebted very much to chance for ever having been able to put this peculiar affair together—a party of students were carousing in a top floor room in a house in one of the worst quarters of Paris. They were a devil-may-care lot, and one or two were wanted by the police. Not for anything very serious, mind you—for a drunken brawl, perhaps, or a little over-exuberance after a students' ball. The gambling was at its height when suddenly they heard the sound of a man rushing upstairs. The light was extinguished, and they held their breath and waited. Then the man burst into the apartment—an Englishman."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"Well, I told you they were a hare-brained crew, an ingenious lot of practical jokers, an irresponsible set of scamps, and one had a brilliant idea to fool the Englishman. He told it to his comrades, and it was hailed with a suppressed roar of merriment. They were to pretend to the stranger that he had broken into a solemn conclave of a secret society. Make him take his chance with them, and draw for a life. Do you follow the story?"

"I begin to understand. Go on."

"Your father was that man, Astray, and his disposition was as yours is now—unable to face danger. As you made a mistake and fled from your accuser, he made a mistake and dared to defy them. He accepted the proposal and drew for the life of a woman. They began as a joke, they carried it on to teach him a lesson."

"Brave men."

"If he had refused to carry out the scheme and dared them to take his life, the light would have been turned up, he would have discovered that the cold barrel against his temple was only a short poker, and would have been invited to spend the evening with the lightest-hearted lot of scamps in Paris. But he did not defy them, he agreed to their plans."

"Or pretended to. Any man would have done the same."

"So they kept up the joke, one or two were well connected, and they introduced him to a good set of people, and a pretty girl was chosen for the victim—a girl so pretty that they knew the blackest-hearted, foulest-minded brute could not have raised a finger against her. Then they sent him notes and letters urging him to do the deed."

"Murdering him by inches," Astray cried, trembling with suppressed rage. "Goading him to despair. A good joke—they must have been a merry crew, indeed! Go on, what more?"

"There is no more. Presently they tired of their joke. The girl left Paris, so did your father, and the whole affair only became a good after-dinner story—how they fooled the Englishman."

"But the tracking through Europe?"

"Your father's imagination only. It never existed. This is the cruel point. The pitiless part of that practical joke. Can't you imagine the feelings of a man who thought he was being shadowed through Europe, that the day must inevitably come when a sharp thrust would end his life. In every shadow he saw an assassin, in every face a spy. The fear was always in his mind that perhaps he would not see that evening's sun set, that he had entered upon his last day. Kept from the woman he loved for fear of carrying danger to her, always on the alert, always suspicious, always with the fear of death hanging over him, to a sensitive man there could be only one ending. He lost his reason: lost it hopelessly on the day he heard of your mother's death."

"Of her death?"

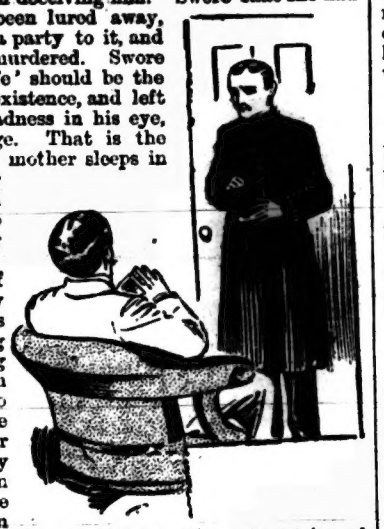
"Yes, her death. She died suddenly, and lies buried in a country churchyard near Kintore. The churchyard of the village where he hid her, from the fear of their enemies."

"But the abduction told in the diary?"

"That account was written after her death. Haunted by the dread of assassination they lived apart after his visit to Paris, he coming down once or twice in six months for a day. I heard this part of the story from the rector of the village. Your mother fell ill and died suddenly, very suddenly; no one knew where to send for your father, and she was buried.

"Two days after a telegram came to your mother asking her to come to London. No answer could be sent, and so they waited for him. The rector broke the news to him and has since repeated the story to me. Told me how your father listened without a word, walked to the churchyard, gazed at the grave without a tear, and then returned to the house and found the telegram which he had himself sent the day before.

"Then his reason left him. In a paroxysm of madness he charged them all with deceiving him. Swore that she had not died, but had been lured away, that they were all a party to it, and that she had been murdered. Swore that 'a life for a life' should be the only object of his existence, and left the village with madness in his eye, foaming for revenge. That is the whole story. Your mother sleeps in her grave, your father has been murdered, but by no gang of assassins, for none existed."



"No gang of assassins," Astray cried, rising to his feet, and struggling with rage; "No gang of assassins? when they drove a man to madness for the satisfaction of their own humour. My bitterest curse be on each and everyone who had a hand in the torture of my father, and blight what yet remains of his life. For each and everyone who took a part in that night's devilment shared in the murder. They robbed him of his reason, and left him an easy prey to the one who took his life."

"The murderer is yet to be discovered," Darrent answered quietly. "We have found nothing from this diary, and we must begin at the beginning again—and time presses."

"What do you mean by time presses? The law dare not hang me in the face of the statements in that diary. I shall be released in a few days, and then together we will seek the murderer, and never rest until he is brought to justice."

"We will hope for the best," was all that Herbert Darrent could say as he shook Astray's hand and left him.

CHAPTER X.

HERBERT DARRENT PROPOSES A TOAST.

HERBERT DARRENT had left Astray buoyed up with hope. Together they had gone page by page through old Marsden's diary, and together had come to the conclusion that here at last was something like the truth.

Astray was exultant in what he called the full establishment of his innocence, but Darrent's enthusiasm was a little less pronounced. He recognised that while there was undoubtedly much in the diary that was true, there was also much that revealed nothing but the wanderings of an enfeebled intellect, and that in any endeavour to get the sentence passed upon Astray Marsden revoked, there would be the greatest difficulty to persuade the Home Office where the truth ended and imagination commenced. If Josiah Marsden dreamt that he had killed his enemy, the man who dogged his footsteps through Europe, and had chronicled as a fact in his diary that he had done so, when it could be conclusively proved that at the date set down he had not been away from Norcombe, it was equally possible that the final entry, the one that said that Astray had been and gone, might also be regarded as the outcome of a dream, and Darrent was bound to own this possibility to himself—although he now thoroughly believed in the innocence of the man—that Astray might have returned.

He felt that Astray was innocent; and yet, if Astray had not committed the murder, who had? Was it a stranger, perhaps a tramp, after all?

It would be hard, very hard, to make cool-headed, red-taped Home Office officials believe that a man who had been stabbed had in the throes of death written: "I am dying, murdered by a stranger."

Why should he? That was the question that perplexed Darrent? Why? To exonerate his son, with whom he had quarrelled that night, in case he should be accused. Hum, it was possible, when one looked at it in that light.

Perhaps that construction placed on the paper, together with the diary, might have some effect upon the Home Office authorities; anyhow, he could but try. His efforts had condemned Astray Marsden, and now his duty was to obtain the release of Astray, and then together they would search until they brought the real culprit to justice.

In the midst of these reflections—dubious and anxious as to what the ultimate result would be—Darrent was interrupted as he sat by the fire in his own room at the Nine Bells at Norcombe by a rapping at the door.

"Come in," he cried, and Constable Thompson entered.

"Well, Thompson," he exclaimed heartily, for he had taken a fancy to the young constable, "what can I do for you?"

Constable Thompson was evidently ill at ease; he shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, and twisted the strap of his helmet nervously between his fingers.

"Sit down, Thompson—make yourself at home."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now then, come, what is it?"

"I suppose you're going back to London for good, sir, now?"

"Oh, I see, you desire promotion, eh? Want me to say a word at headquarters? I'll be delighted."

"No, it's not that; it's about the trial, sir."

"Oh. Well, what is it?"

"Do you feel——?" and Thompson hesitated again.

"Do I feel what, man? Go on, go on."

"Well, do you feel you've got the right man?"

"Astray Marsden is condemned. Is that all you've got to say?"

"No, sir. I'm not blaming you for any mistake, because you've only put this and that together; but there has been a mistake, sir."

"Well, if that's the case, we'll get him out just as easily as we put him in. Now then, my lad," Darrent continued, rising and clapping his visitor on the shoulder, "you didn't come to see me just to tell me that. What more do you know? Stay, have a drink," and he poured out a couple of whiskies-and-sodas.

"My respects, sir."

"Thank you. Now then."

"Well, sir, of course, I'm not a detective like you are; but I've read a lot of detective tales, I'm very partial to them, and—er——"

"Well?"

"I've always found in them that detectives took such a lot of notice of footmarks, and—er—well, you didn't."

"The footprints were obliterated, trampled out by a pack of idle fools, who had nothing better to do than stare through the windows, and fancy they could see ghosts, long before I got to the Grange."

"Well, sir, I saw them when they were fresh."

"Yes, what were they like?"

"I took this copy," Thompson said, pulling a piece of paper from his pocket, "it's the exact size."

Darrent snatched the paper and excitedly examined it. Toe tips—heel tips—hob-nails. "Confound it, a yokel!"

And there rang through Darrent's brain as plainly as if the man were standing beside him, speaking the words: "And the 'strodinary part of it was that I got up in the mornin' and twenty of them cows was froze."

"Why have you kept this to yourself all this time?" Darrent sharply asked, turning on the man.

"Well, you were so mighty cocksure, I thought you would have thought it impertinence for me to have tried to show you anything," the other retorted with some amount of irritation.

Darrent bit his lips, thoroughly annoyed; he remembered how he had taken a curious delight in mystifying and surprising this novice, and he had been caught in his own trap.

"Thompson," he said, after a moment or two, "you're quite right. I was an idiot, but we are together on the right side now, and I'm going to save Astray Marsden."

"That being so, sir, I'm sorry——"

"Nothing to be sorry about, my lad, but you should not have given way to temper; it might have been bad for Astray. Never mind; leave me now, and we'll soon have him out of gaol, and put the right man there instead."

"Suppose it was that thickheaded yokel," Darrent mused as his visitor departed. "Well, stranger things have happened. Come in, come in. What is it?"

"A letter for you, just come, sir."

"Thanks. Hum—London postmark."

The contents of the note caused him to start to his feet in surprise.

"*Astra is something towards 'Astray,' and so it is towards 'a stranger,'*" he read, and that was all.

Then someone else had caught on to the same idea as himself. Someone who was afraid to sign his name—someone perhaps—he gasped, as the idea struck him, someone who did not mind killing an old man, but had enough conscience left not to let a young man suffer for the crime. A clue at last to the actual murderer.

Turning again to the pencilled copy of the footprint, Darrent gazed at it carefully; three of the hob-nails were missing from the sole, just behind the toe-piece. He shook his head. No, it was not a yokel's boot after all, but a strong, well-made—he jumped up and pulled the bell.

"Send a messenger to the police station for Constable Dobson at once," he cried, as his ring was answered.

He looked at his watch, five minutes to seven, Dobson would be there in ten minutes. In eight minutes Darrent walked down stairs. "Tell Dobson to wait," he said, and then stepped out and stood in the shadow of a tree until the Chief Constable had arrived and entered the Nine Bells, and then he strode rapidly down to the police station. He pushed open the door, the room was empty. A pair of Constable Dobson's boots stood in a corner by the fireplace. In an instant he had them in his hands. No nails missing

Have you seen Uncle Will's page in THE SUNDAY READER, boys and girls? There are some first-rate stories, easy competitions, pretty pictures, and splendid prizes, all for you.

but they were exactly the size and hape of the drawing on the paper. So far so good, but Darrent was not yet satisfied. He took out the note that he had received by post that evening, and held it to the light of the lamp.

"A five star diamond," he muttered, and then searching about he discovered Constable Dobson's limited stock of stationery, and submitted it to the same scrutiny, but without result. The police station only boasted about half a quire of the commonest paper, too common even to show the faintest watermark. Every drawer, cupboard, and box Darrent examined minutely, but discovered nothing to reward his painstaking search. Then the floor, a loose board, ah!—he gasped with excitement as he inserted the blade of his knife, and up it came. Nothing there? Yes, a small parcel! In an instant it was in his hands and untied—only a book! Ah, but what a book! A bank book

of an Exeter bank, and a glance at the figures showed that Edward Dobson had accumulated the respectable little balance of £1,165 17s. 3d., which was standing to his credit. Darrent slipped the book into his pocket, replaced the board, and strolled back to the Nine Bells.

"He must be a wonderfully clever constable who saves over £1,000 without getting into some dishonesty," he murmured to himself, as he mounted the stairs and opened the door of his room. "Well, we shall see."

Constable Dobson, a very plain and washed-out specimen compared with the highly-coloured one Darrent encountered on his first visit to Norcombe, was sitting in a dejected attitude with his elbows on his knees and his chin resting on his hands, and slowly raised his head as Darrent entered.

"Good evening, sir," he said in a subdued voice, so subdued that Darrent almost pitied him.

"Good evening. No, don't rise; hold up your foot, the left, thanks." In an instant he had caught the foot, glanced at the sole of the boot, and let it go again, while Dobson went pale to the very lips.

"That will do. Consider yourself under arrest for the murder of Josiah Marsden, and I warn you——"

"My God! sir, Mr. Darrent, you don't mean it? I'm innocent! I'm innocent!"

"That you'll have an opportunity of proving to a jury."

"I swear I am. I would not murder a man. I haven't the courage."

"You were the one who walked up to the Grange, and left by the back way to the river. Don't lie!"

"I won't, sir, I won't. I did that, but I did not murder him; on my soul I didn't, Mr. Darrent."

"Then who did?"

"Astray Marsden!"

"Bah! that's all over. Don't try to shield yourself that way."

"But the paper——"

"You wrote it, you liar!"

"No, no, I swear I didn't! I'll tell the truth—the whole truth, sir. I'm everything that's bad, but I'm not a murderer!"

Darrent made the wildest random shot he ever ventured upon in his life. "Josiah Marsden never wrote that paper," he said.

"Then he did, and he murdered him!"

"Who?" almost shouted Darrent.

"Silas Gosnell."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you, all, sir; I'll tell the truth; I swear I will, I swear I will."

"You'd better go ahead then."

"Well, about a year and a half ago, old Marsden came into my cottage one night to see me. He used to look in now and again, sir, just to talk. He liked me to tell him stories about the police."

"Well, go on."

"Well, he told me that he'd murdered a man."

"Oh!"

"Said he'd been over to Paris, lured him to a quiet place, and stabbed him to the heart."

"I see. Well?"

"I didn't know what to do, so I asked Mr. Gosnell."

"Why?"

"Well, I let it slip in talking to him one day."

"What an awful fool you are, Dobson."

"Yes, sir," he replied, moistening his parched lips, "I believe I am."

"Drink this," ejaculated Darrent, scarcely able to conceal his disgust at the pitiful state of the man, as he handed him a glass of brandy-and-water. "Now then, go on."

"Gosnell said we'd struck the reef, and it would pan out a bonanza."

"Right. That sounds like Gosnell."

"He told me to leave it to him, and he'd make money, and we'd divide it, and we've been dividing it ever since. He used to go up to the Grange and threaten to give the old man up to justice, and talk about hanging, until Marsden nearly died of fright, and then he'd say how much he wanted to keep quiet. I've had £1,165 as my share."

"£1,165 17s. 3d., Dobson."

"No, sir. I saved the 17s. 3d. myself," Dobson mournfully answered, and Darrent almost burst into laughter at the sudden transition from the sublime to the ridiculous.

"Well, go on; get to the night of the murder."

"On the night of the murder I was on my round, and as I passed the Grange about one, I saw someone standing at the window. I could tell it was not Marsden, and I walked up to the door, and, as I reached there, Gosnell opened it."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Keep off, or I'll brain you.'"

"Well?"

"I said: 'It's Dobson,' and he said: 'Oh, I was just coming for you, there's been murder done here.' Then he took me in and showed me the old man lying dead on the floor. He said that he came there to get some more money out of Marsden, and as he came up to the front door a man rushed out, nearly knocking him over, and took to his heels. I said: 'Then it's young Marsden, he's back.' Well, he answered: 'We don't want to be in this, and we'll clear out, but not the front way, in case we run against anyone and get suspected. Come on, I know how to escape;' and then he took me through the conservatory at the back of the Grange, out down a flight of steps, and along a tunnel to the river."

"Well?"

"Next morning I had a fearful feeling that Gosnell had done the murder himself, and I went over to his cottage about seven and told him so."

"What did he say?"

"He laughed, and said I was mad, and then took a paper from his pocket, the paper I gave you, Mr. Darrent, and said: 'I found this in old Marsden's hand when I went into the library.'"

"That was the paper that accused Astray?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go on."

"Well, he gave me the paper and advised me to say nothing about it to the authorities, but to keep it quiet, as it would be worth thousands to bleed Astray with. So later on when the woman Gadsden fetched me, I pretended to take the paper out of old Marsden's hand."

"You're a nice blackguard, Dobson."

"Yes, Mr. Darrent, but I did not commit the murder."

"Now then, come on," cried Darrent, "let's see if we can find Mr. Silas Gosnell."

He began to realise that he had been too wedded to one set of incidents alone, had ignored all other clues, and while he had been forging the chains around an innocent man, the guilty wretch had had time to put thousands of miles between himself and justice.

"Where does Gosnell live?"

"At a little house opposite the Grange, on the other side of the river."

"Come on, look sharp."

Together they started off, and after looking in at the police station for a chisel, made straight for the abode of Silas Gosnell. There was no answer to their repeated knockings.

"Gone, curse him!" Darrent muttered. "Now then, Dobson, put your shoulder to it. Go on—now together—ah!"

With a splitting, splintering crash, the frail door gave way beneath their united efforts, and they stumbled into the cottage.

Darrent, much to the amazement of Dobson, turned on his electric lamp, and made for an old writing-desk in the corner. There was no need for force. Every drawer had been left open, and a pile of burnt paper in the grate showed that Mr. Silas Gosnell had had a good clear out, and had destroyed everything he did not require before he shook the dust of Norcombe from his feet.

A sheet or two of plain notepaper lay in one of the drawers, a sheet or two with the watermark of a Five Star Diamond, and Darrent placed them carefully in his pocket-book.

"I think this is for you, sir," Dobson exclaimed, handing Darrent a note he had picked up from the table; and Darrent, as he read the superscription, felt a horrible desire to kick someone, or, for the matter of that, even himself, failing a better target.

"To the smart (?) detective in charge of the Norcombe murder case."

With a curse he tore open the envelope and perused the contents, written in the same sprawling hand as his note of the afternoon.

"To the English Lecoq.

"Wal, sir, I guess you've had a nice long sleep. Wake up, and own yourself a fool. I, Silas Gosnell, killed—not murdered, but killed—Josiah Marsden.

"He had been kind enough to pay me an annuity, and I went as usual to collect my allowance on the night of the murder.

"The old man was madder than ever. Talked about blackmail and all that sort of thing, worked himself up into the fury of a maniac, and suddenly went bang for me with the poker. I reeled back and my hand touched a knife. I wish it hadn't, but it did. It was his life or mine. I preferred his. As to that paper, you're all been tricked. I wrote it, wrote it because that soft-brained ass of a constable, that old fool Dobson, smelt a rat. I thought the best thing was to give him a chance of bleeding Astray Marsden to keep him quiet. The idiot gave the whole show away.

"I thought when I wrote it, if anything went wrong it might be pleaded that the old man was going to write 'a stranger,' but I did not think such a brilliant young detective as yourself would take up the case and effectually condemn an innocent man.

"Things are too hot for me. I leave for America by the 'Strelesia.'

"Good-bye.

"I am, my dear Lecoq, ever indebted to you for your blind stupidity, and so sign myself,

"Always gratefully yours,

"SILAS GOSNELL."

"The *Strelesia!*" Darrent exclaimed, "that's the boat."

Taking a paper from his pocket he rapidly glanced down the columns until his eye caught a paragraph headed:

"THE OVERDUE LINER."

"No news of the *Strelesia* has yet come to hand, and the greatest anxiety is felt as to her safety. The boat is now five days overdue."

Without a word to Dobson, he rushed from the house to the post-office, and having sent a lengthy telegram to Scotland Yard, hired a horse and started off at a gallop towards Barnstaple.

"It's a run against time with a vengeance," he muttered, as he tore through the night. "If the *Strelesia* is not in yet, we'll have Mr. Gosnell safe, before he can wink."

The placard of a London paper caught his eye as he dashed through Barnstaple:

"TERRIBLE WRECK OF A LINER.
OVER 250 LIVES LOST,"

and pulling his horse back upon his haunches, he jumped off and dashed into the shop.

"Total wreck of the *Strelesia*," he read, in glowing headlines. "Fearful loss of life." And then: "A boat was picked up in Mid Atlantic by the *Majestic*, having on board five of the crew of the missing steamship *Strelesia*, these being the only survivors of the ill-fated vessel."

Then followed the names and some brief personal narratives.

It was useless to proceed to London, and Herbert Darrent returned to his hotel to find another note awaiting him. Another of Silas Gosnell's mocking epistles:

"Dear M. Lecoq,—Why don't you have a look at Silas Gosnell's house by the river?"

"Well, there's one thing in favour of the poor wretch," Darrent soliloquised, as he placed it with the others in his pocket-book. "He didn't intend to let an innocent man suffer for his crime."

* * * * *

It is midsummer at Norcombe. There is a mighty clinking of glasses, an energetic clattering of knives on plates, and a boisterous hammering of fists on the table, until the sugar cupids and doves on the frosted cake bob up and down in sheer exuberance of spirits, and Herbert Darrent rises and divides glances of masculine admiration between two of the bridesmaids.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he remarks, coming back to realities. "I am not going to make a speech."

There is a "Hear, hear!"—one always does drop in at such times, and much laughter ensues. "I feel honoured," he continues, "too honoured for any display of eloquence, and I will content myself by asking you to drink the health of the happy pair, and to join me in wishing my friend, Astray Marsden, and his charming wife, every happiness that this world can give."

THE END.

I HEREBY CERTIFY *that the premium in respect of PEARSON'S WEEKLY £1,000 RAILWAY INSURANCE, of the PEARSON'S WEEKLY £1,000 FOOTBALL and CYCLING BURGLARY INSURANCE, and also of the* **FOOTBALL and CYCLING INSURANCE**, *has been paid up to January 31st, 1898, and that therefore every purchaser of* **PEARSON'S WEEKLY** *is insured with this Company against Fatal Railway Accident to the extent of* **ONE THOUSAND POUNDS**, *and against Fatal Football and Cycling Accident, and against Burglary under the conditions named in the notices on page 393.*

General Manager for the Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation Ltd.

Rich S. Tavell

Turn to page 397. There you will find particulars of a football competition, the like of which you have never seen before.

TO SAVE A YOUNG LADY.

Not very long ago the editor of one of the most artistic Parisian papers—the *Courrier Français*—was applied to by despairing parents to suggest a means of saving the life of their daughter, a beautiful young girl, who was suffering from anæmia of the most severe form. Our French contemporary decided that the best plan would be to refer the matter to the whole French press, requesting his brother editors to kindly insert the inquiry, with the purpose of getting their readers to state *what Remedy* in similar cases *had given the best results.*

Within the space of eight days the editor of the *Courrier Français* received some thousands of letters, which, being compiled, offered no less than 400 remedies of different sorts; but most of the letters agreed in proclaiming the wonderful virtues and the prompt efficacy of the genuine "Fer Bravais," which it appears is beyond all question the best regenerator.

The young lady was therefore submitted, without delay, to the "Fer Bravais" Treatment, which consists in taking before each meal, in a little water or wine, a few concentrated drops of this tonic, which is absolutely free from any objectionable smell or taste. After a fortnight's treatment the girl was considered safe; she had recovered her strength, her gaiety, and her appetite, and her complexion was of a fine and healthy colour. This is not all. Following the recovery of the young lady, who is, as mentioned, very beautiful, the *Courrier Français* published her picture, with a message of thanks to all those who had recommended to her the "Fer Bravais." No doubt owing to this publicity this young lady must have since made a very rich marriage.

This was truly a rather original idea, and one which was worthy of being called a Yankee notion. No need to say that the Pharmacie Centrale du Nord, 132, Rue Lafayette, where the "Fer Bravais" is sold, was literally besieged during the whole following month, the "Fer Bravais" bottles selling with astonishing rapidity.

A doctor friend of ours assures us that if a similar plebiscite were tested over here in England, the results would be equally favourable to the "Fer Bravais."

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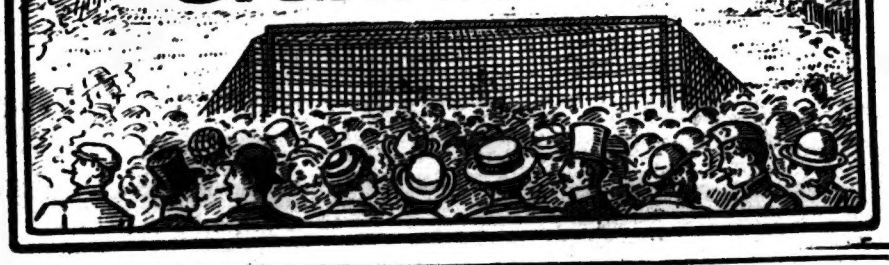

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The demand for the Pastime Parcel will be very heavy, and, of course, the supply is limited. All applications will be dealt with as quickly as possible, the parcels being sent per parcel post, postage paid. Do not be uneasy about a little delay, as the competition will be open until February 5th, 1898.

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